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**Jonathan Edwards: “Born to be a Man of Strife”  
The Evolution of a Persona**

Carol Elaine BALL

BTh (ACTh), GradDipMin (QBCM), BA, MPhil (Queensland)

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School of History, Philosophy, Religion, and Classics

## ABSTRACT

It has been rightly noted that, while three centuries of scholarship on Jonathan Edwards has revealed much of his philosophy, theology and epistemology, yet we know very little of the person himself. Using insights from philosophical and literary disciplines as applied to the field of persona, this thesis examines a representative selection of the writings of Jonathan Edwards, in order to trace and assess the evolution of Jonathan Edwards's persona in the context of eighteenth-century New England. In particular, it shows how the Edwards persona was developed not only as a result of a carefully crafted intentional strategy on his part but also in response to the unplanned but inevitable conflicts that plagued his ecclesiastical career. The tension between his innately contemplative nature and the active demands of public office as he executed his professional role was a constant source of internal and public strife for Edwards. He was, as he termed it, "born to be a man of strife."

This tension was a major factor in the self-fashioning which Edwards progressively underwent, and so the motif of persona development through conflicts and crises runs through the thesis. While such tension caused him to be ousted from his public office, it also led ultimately to a personal liberation in which his authentic self was expressed. Early in his adult life, Edwards's personal experiential religion had laid the groundwork of his essential theological message. While constantly seeking to master this message, he was in turn mastered by that message and came to embody the truths he thought important to communicate. It was in his mature writings rather than his ministerial practice that we see revealed the essential personal Edwards. Consequently, while Edwards is often hailed as a great practitioner and apologist of religious revival as experienced in the Great Awakening, it is as a writer that he has made such a great contribution to religious thought and practice.

The thesis begins by locating the study of Edwards's persona within the investigative parameters of philosophy and literature. Thus it establishes a base for the analysis of Edwards's self-fashioning of his persona in terms of the many conflicts in which he was engaged, the critical turning points in his life, and the strategies he crafted for managing these conflicts and crises (Introduction). After analysing the fundamental theological grounding of Edwards in his developing concept of and submission to the absoluteness of God in his sovereignty (chapter 1), the thesis traces his many conflicts, both universal and local, which were instrumental in shaping his persona (chapters 2-4). It was these conflicts that determined not only the focus of his battles but also the literary means by which he would counter and

control those alien forces ranged against him. Progressively, the fully developed persona of Edwards as a self-assured authoritative theological and ecclesial leader became clearly manifest. His growing mastery of literary forms is analysed in chapter 5, which focuses on this literary aspect of Edwards, not as a study of his literary talents *per se*, but as a study of his use of literature as a deliberate tool in the crafting of his public persona. The thesis then reviews Edwards's vocational life in several stages which demonstrate the formation and consolidation of his public persona to the point of its mature expression at Stockbridge (chapter 6). The concluding Chapter 7 brings together the various strands of the foregoing chapters in an overall assessment of the significance of Edwards's self-fashioning for an appreciation of his overall contribution to the history of Christian thought and practice.

Finally, when he became relatively freed from the constraints of ecclesiastical politics and social distractions of office, Edwards attained the self-assured quasi-apostolic status of one who believed not only that he had the right to be heard but indeed that he must be heard. Ultimately, the public face and the essential person became merged into one integrated whole. This is the development of that persona that he worked so consistently, so strategically and so successfully to fashion. In summary, the Edwards persona was shaped definitively not by his praxis but by his writing. In some ways a somewhat pedestrian active practitioner, Edwards stamped himself as a superlative contemplative apologist and theorist of experiential spirituality.

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE ELUSIVE JONATHAN EDWARDS

#### I GETTING TO KNOW EDWARDS

Jonathan Edwards was a person of immense personal integrity, piety and faith, regarded by many as the greatest theologian, pastor, preacher, philosopher and literary artist that America has ever produced. Churchmen and academics alike are nonplussed by the fact that a man of Jonathan Edwards's stature could be fired by his parishioners. Perhaps this anomaly can be explained in part by the conclusions drawn at the 2003 birthday celebrations for Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), where it was suggested that despite the enormous volume of writing on Edwards, we still may not know him very well. Most agreed that more work needs to be done to tell stories about Edwards's thought and life that are realistic, located, disturbing or edifying, depending on the perspective of the reader.<sup>1</sup>

To address these challenges, this study investigates the *persona* of the philosophical theologian Jonathan Edwards by using the concept of *persona* as developed in philosophical and literary disciplines. In focussing on the persona of Edwards, the study traces the stance which he self-consciously developed, a stance which was to some degree both inherited and adopted, and shaped by both the private and public expectations of office as well as the context which set the parameters of such expectations.

Edwards dreamed of writing a great treatise that would "put every man clean out of conceit with his imagination," a feat that would possibly have led to an academic career and perhaps an international eminence comparable with that of Locke or Newton.<sup>2</sup> A major contention of this thesis is that he was actively and deliberately involved in fashioning his life in order to achieve this goal. He consciously and consistently enhanced his natural talents as a writer. In his "Cover-Leaf Memoranda" (1723-1726),<sup>3</sup> he set out a personal discipline for writing which he crafted into a sophisticated technique throughout his career. The "Cover-Leaf

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, "Conference Review: The Edwards at 300 Symposium and the Future of Jonathan Edwards Studies," *Early American Literature* 39, no. 2 (2004): 405-7.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson H. Kinnach, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1743-1758*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 25 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Natural Philosophy" Cover-Leaf Memorandum in Wallace E. Anderson, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 6 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1980), 192-5.



Memoranda” contains a set of rules of composition which were designed to optimize the reception of his work by as wide an audience as possible.<sup>4</sup>

Life was a struggle for Jonathan Edwards. His mature self- assessment was that he was “born to be a man of strife.” He certainly experienced more than his share of conflict during his life: conflict within himself over God’s sovereignty; conflict between his personal experience and his received tradition; conflict between his vocation and his personal quest for holiness; conflict between his philosophical worldview and that of the British and Continental Enlightenment thinkers; conflict between those who supported the Awakenings and those who condemned them because of their excesses; conflict with his parishioners’ lax practices and his extended family’s lax ethics. All of these conflicts, and the careful and strategic ways in which he responded to them, contributed significantly to the formation of the persona of Edwards.

## II A NEW APPROACH

Philosophy provides a fertile starting point for such a study of Edwards, the philosophical theologian.<sup>5</sup> During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ancient notions of philosophical personae were preserved and recovered and made central to the elaboration of philosophical debate.<sup>6</sup> Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Boyle and Locke were all engaged in defending and instantiating a philosophical persona against others they regarded as inimical to true philosophy.<sup>7</sup> Their aim was to see a right relationship between what was said and who said it. This gave an utterance authority.<sup>8</sup> Conal Condren, Gaukroger and Hunter’s *The Philosopher of Early Modern Europe* (2006) shifts the focus “from the philosopher as proxy for the universal subject of reason” to “the philosopher as a special persona.” The authors argue for a new and more thoroughly historical approach to the history of early modern philosophy and focus on the “complementary phenomena of the contested character of philosophy” and the persona necessary for its practice, that is, “the purpose-built self whose cognitive capacities and moral bearing are cultivated for the sake of knowledge, deemed philosophical.” To understand a

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix for the precise details of the “Cover-Leaf Memoranda.”

<sup>5</sup> Historically, the tradition of philosophical self-fashioning has an essential relationship to the figures of Socrates and his disciple Plato. In their works, self-fashioning is essential to philosophy as a way of life. R. Lanier Anderson and Joshua Landy, “Philosophy as Self-fashioning: Alexander Nehamas’s *Art of Living*,” *Diacritics* 31, no. 1 (2001): 26, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger and Ian Hunter, eds., *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe: The Nature of Contested Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

philosophical problem the philosopher must engage in a “process of self-presentation” and an “act of self-problematization,” or advocate an “idealized character” to which potential philosophers should aspire.<sup>9</sup>

In *Rival Enlightenments* (2001), Ian Hunter developed a particular approach to the history of philosophy in which he focuses on the “ascetic” or “self-transformative work” that certain philosophies required their adherents to “perform on themselves,” only then “addressing the object of knowledge to which they promise access.” This approach operates principally by treating their different anthropologies and cosmologies, “not in terms of the self they uncovered” or the “cosmos they reveal,” but “in terms of the self they seek to shape for a world they envisage.”<sup>10</sup> Condren and Hunter elsewhere identify two overlapping aspects of the philosophical persona in their introduction to *The Persona of the Philosopher in the Eighteenth Century* (2008).<sup>11</sup> There was clearly the technical, comprising the sorts of practical and intellectual skills needed for philosophizing, but there was also the more overtly ethical. The persona entailed cultivation of a moral disposition to enquiry and the responsibilities of communication and teaching. They noted that, since antiquity, the overarching and highly accommodating distinction between the active and contemplative lives had provided the most general rubric for exploring the priorities of a philosophical life.<sup>12</sup> In *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England, The Presupposition of Oaths and Offices* (2006), Conal Condren stresses the importance of persona to office, which he defines as “the expectation that people must behave according to the requirements of their respective offices. Moral, political and intellectual judgment was a function of office and the agent was a persona.”<sup>13</sup>

In the field of literature, Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) takes the sixteenth century as the focus for his study because it is the period when there was a large-scale sense of human identity as open to fashioning.<sup>14</sup> Self-fashioning could achieve “a distinctive personality; a characteristic address to the world; a

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), x-xi.

<sup>11</sup> Conal Condren and Ian Hunter, “Introduction: The Persona of the Philosopher in the Eighteenth Century,” *Intellectual History Review* 18, Issue 3 (2008): 315-17.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 315-317.

<sup>13</sup> Conal Condren, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England, The Presupposition of Oaths and Offices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 1.

consistent mode of perceiving and behaving; the representation of one's nature or intention in speech or actions."<sup>15</sup> Greenblatt believes that self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life. It invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters and the shaping of one's own identity.<sup>16</sup> Greenblatt developed protocols for the study of self-fashioning a persona in and through literature based on what he calls "governing conditions common to most instances of self-fashioning."<sup>17</sup> His interpretive practice concerns itself with three major literary functions of "aliens," "conflicts" and "turning points."<sup>18</sup> Self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien. What is produced in this encounter partakes of both the authority and the alien that is marked for attack and hence any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss.<sup>19</sup>

In keeping with the insights of Hunter et al into the construction of the persona of the philosopher and Greenblatt into self-fashioning, this thesis investigates the way in which Edwards fashioned himself as an ecclesiastical leader. Edwards was involved in just about every controversy that raged in his time and therefore the influence of the events that shaped his thought cannot be ignored through de-contextualizing him. The tensions in Edwards's life - within his own tradition and between his tradition and the surrounding socio-religious landscape/culture - cast most light on Edwards the person.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Literature functions in three interlocking ways for Greenblatt: (i) as a manifestation of the concrete behaviour of its particular author; (ii) as itself the expression of the codes by which behaviour is shaped; and (iii) as a reflection upon those codes. Ibid., 5.

<sup>17</sup> Greenblatt's governing conditions are the following:

1. None of the figures inherits a title, an ancient family tradition or hierarchical status that might have rooted personal identity in the identity of a clan or caste. 2. Self-fashioning for such figures involves submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self – God, a sacred book, an institution such as church, court, colonial or military administration. 3. Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. The threatening other – heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist – must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed. 4. The alien is perceived by the authority either as that which is unformed or chaotic (the absence of order) or that which is false or negative (the demonic parody of order). 5. One man's authority is another man's alien. 6. When one authority or alien is destroyed, another takes its place. 7. There is always more than one authority and more than one alien in existence at any given time. 8. If both the authority and the alien are located outside the self, they are at the same time experienced as inward necessities, so that both submission and destruction are always already internalized. 9. Self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language. 10. The power generated to attack the alien in the name of the authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend. Hence, self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self. Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>20</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 10.

Jonathan Edwards was committed to embodying the truths he thought important to communicate. He well knew the value and authority of a visible, living testimony to the truth. At the outset of his career, Edwards established in his own life the core message that he would proclaim: God's absolute sovereignty, his own personal inability, a new sense of the heart (will), and the idea of being swallowed up in God by God's visible beauty, excellency and holiness. Edwards consistently presented himself and his own consummate example of this as the ideal to which others should aspire. Clearly he possessed the practical and intellectual skills necessary to discharge his position, but more important to him was embodying his message. New Englanders had high expectations of those who occupied the office of minister and along with the prestige of high office came certain responsibilities and duties that had to be performed. Edwards made considerable efforts to fulfil his official role and to manage the numerous conflicts he had with those whose convictions were alien to his own. That these efforts were carefully crafted, even at times contrived, is clearly revealed in his writings.

### **III CASTING THE MOULD**

Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) was born October 5 in East Windsor, Connecticut, the fifth child and only son in a family of eleven children born to Timothy and Esther Stoddard Edwards. When he was born, both the ecclesiastical context and the path he should take had already been mapped for him by his Puritan forebears, his grandfather Solomon Stoddard and his father Timothy Edwards, who were both clerics. The well established ecclesiastical context of New England was that of a Puritan theocracy, with its institutional forms governing not only personal beliefs and morality but also the understanding of nature, history, all human activities and institutions such as government, economics, art, literature, education, and the family.<sup>21</sup>

Edwards's formal training began early with the study of Latin at the age of seven. His father ran the elementary school as a part of his ministerial responsibilities and had a small library. Edwards began his college life with a formal training in the classics.<sup>22</sup> In 1716, he entered the Collegiate School which was designated as Yale College two years later, where he continued Latin and Greek, undertook Hebrew and added logic, physics, geometry, astronomy and

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<sup>21</sup> Jerald C. Brauer, "The Rule of the Saints in American Politics," *Church History* 27, no. 3 (September 1958): 242.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas H. Johnson, "Jonathan Edwards's Background of Reading," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, Vol. 28 (1931): 194-6.

metaphysics. His logic classes involved syllogistic disputation five times a week, using as textbooks Ramus, Burgersdicius, Keckermann, Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole.<sup>23</sup> During his time at Yale (1716-22), first as an undergraduate, then as an MA student, Edwards immersed himself in the literature of the emerging British and Continental Enlightenment.<sup>24</sup>

Public life began for Edwards while he was still in his teens. From August 1722 until April 1723, he was the pastor of a small Presbyterian church in New York City; from November 1723 until May 1724, he was the pastor of a small church at Bolton, Connecticut. From 1724 to 1726, he tutored at Yale prior to receiving a request for assistance from his grandfather Solomon Stoddard whose protégé and pastoral assistant he became at Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1726. In July 1727, he married Sarah Pierpont, a kindred spirit who shared his intense infatuation with God.<sup>25</sup> In 1729, when his grandfather died, Edwards became the pastor of the Northampton church and served there until his dismissal in 1750 over “the Halfway Covenant.”<sup>26</sup> In 1751, he settled in Stockbridge and served as a missionary to the Indians for seven years.<sup>27</sup> When Edwards died in 1758 from a smallpox inoculation, he had just been appointed president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton), since many now saw him as the defender of Calvinist orthodoxy.<sup>28</sup>

Despite this rather classical approach to colonial ecclesiastical and academic roles, it is hard to single out a major determinative influence on Edwards’s philosophical development. Of the well known philosophical minds of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, he is perhaps one of the most successful in escaping the historiographic impulse to categorization. His profile as a thinker was fundamentally eclectic and his intellectual development was intimately related to a burgeoning transatlantic culture of print.<sup>29</sup> The complex of ideas in Edwards on virtually any question of philosophy or theology defies a clear-cut genealogy.<sup>30</sup> Recent scholarship on Edwards indicates how deeply enmeshed he was in the European high culture of his day and he wrote in response to numerous British and Continental thinkers –

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 197-8.

<sup>24</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema, eds., *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), 281.

<sup>26</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 354-5.

<sup>27</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, iii-xiv.

<sup>28</sup> Edwards allowed himself to be called a Calvinist, as he said “for distinction sake,” though he “utterly disclaimed a dependence on Calvin,” and did not feel that one could “justly” charge him with “believing, just as he [Calvin] taught,” in Paul Ramsey, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Freedom of the Will*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 131.

<sup>29</sup> Peter J. Thuesen, “Edwards’s Intellectual Background,” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>30</sup> Thuesen, “Edwards’s Intellectual Background,” 23.

Locke, Descartes, Norris, Clarke, Arnauld, Henry More, Malebranche and others. Among this array of thinkers, Malebranche stands out as a prominent influence on Edwards.<sup>31</sup> However, there were a host of other writers well known to Edwards: Thomas Hobbes, Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, William Wollaston, Isaac Newton, Ralph Cudworth, Hugo Grotius, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Lord Kames, John Tilloston, Joseph Butler, Matthew Tindal, John Toland, Thomas Chubb, David Hume and Lord Bolinbroke.<sup>32</sup> Thus, it seems reasonable to think in terms of a great variety of influence rather than individual influences on Edwards. That is, there was a *mélange* of influences that combined to create the unique philosophical milieu in which Edwards's individual creativity flourished.

As well as this philosophical thought world, there was a critical single spiritual experience which underlay the formation of the persona of Edwards. His well-documented conversion experience shook his entire life and radically refashioned his worldview and life of the mind. Most of the characteristics of Edwards's life and thought are traceable to this signal existential moment. Underlying his public life as well as his private life was the vivid and continuous presence of the conversion experience, in which he dedicated his life to God and Christ.<sup>33</sup>

Of special importance to the conflicts which engaged Edwards was the socio-religious context in which he operated. There were three major historical developments that affected one another in complicated ways and set off an immense chain of consequences beginning in the sixteenth century. First, the Reformation of the sixteenth century fragmented the religious unity of the Middle Ages and led to religious pluralism and pluralism of other kinds. Second, the development of the modern state with its central administration ruled by monarchs was fairly well established in England, France and Spain by the end of the sixteenth century, but not in Germany and Italy until the nineteenth century. Finally, the roots of science discovered in Greek and Islamic thought began to flower into modern science beginning in the seventeenth century. Within the confluence of these three movements, Medieval Christianity fragmented as rival authoritative and salvationist religions gave rise to the severe religious

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<sup>31</sup> See Paul Copan, "Jonathan Edwards's Philosophical Influences: Lockean or Malebranchean?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 1 (March, 2001): 107-24. Also Norman S. Fiering, "The Rationalist Foundations of Jonathan Edwards's Metaphysics," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 73-101.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson, "Jonathan Edwards's Background of Reading," 193-222.

<sup>33</sup> Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 61.

conflicts.<sup>34</sup> By the eighteenth century, many hoped to establish a basis of moral knowledge and behaviour, independent of church authority and available to the ordinary reasonable and conscientious person. This done, they wanted to develop the full range of concepts and principles in terms of which to characterize autonomy and responsibility.<sup>35</sup>

Enlightenment thinkers developed an all encompassing programmatic estrangement between God and humanity. Deists adopted a rational religion based on reason and nature, and discarded faith and special revelation (scripture). Mechanical philosophers distanced God from the created order by constructing the world as a huge machine running like a clock, thus confining God to the establishment and maintenance of the laws of nature that regulate natural phenomena. Arminians credited themselves with the final word on their salvation arguing that God justified sinners on the basis of the individual's willingness to respond positively to the gospel. Moral sense theorists detached the moral system from God by basing ethics and morals on secular and naturalistic foundations, and attributing a sense of good and evil, right and wrong, to human intuition without and prior to knowledge of God.

These anthropo-genetic notions were totally alien to Edwards whose convictions about God and his role in the universe emerged during his conversion experience: his *theologia gloriae*, that celebrates God's majestic glory and sovereignty as evident in the coherence and beauty, order and harmony of his creation, and the notion of God's absolute sovereignty.<sup>36</sup> Edwards engaged the intellectual traditions of the eighteenth century in a unique way:

He responded with a novel strategy of appropriating and modifying entire intellectual traditions, reinterpreting them so as to make them subservient to his theological purposes. Rather than starting from the accepted results of the various intellectual disciplines of his day, he delved back to their fundamental principles and sought to reconstruct the very disciplines themselves so as to make them congruent with Christian truth as he understood it.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Barbara Herman (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1-5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Avihu Zakai, "The Conversion of Jonathan Edwards," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 76, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 127.

<sup>37</sup> Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 176.

#### IV WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EDWARDS THUS FAR

Edwards's first biographer and young friend, Samuel Hopkins, painted Edwards as the defender of Calvinist orthodoxy in *Jonathan Edwards 1703-1758: The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Learned and Pious Mr Jonathan Edwards* (1799).<sup>38</sup> His view prevailed until the middle of the twentieth century when Ola Winslow's *Jonathan Edwards 1703-1758: A Biography* (1940)<sup>39</sup> and Perry Miller's *Jonathan Edwards* (1949)<sup>40</sup> introduced a fresh interpretation of his thought. It has become customary to date modern interest in Edwards from the appearance of Miller's enormously influential intellectual biography which set the tone for the renaissance in Edwards studies with his claim that the Northampton sage was "infinitely more than a theologian" and "one of America's major artists."<sup>41</sup>

Following Miller's lead, much scholarship on Edwards tends toward a secularizing and naturalizing interpretation of his ideas. His Christian sermonizing becomes rhetorical theory in Stephen Yarbrough's *Delightful Conviction: Jonathan Edwards and the Rhetoric of Conversion* (1993);<sup>42</sup> his reflections on the beauty of God translate into general aesthetics in Roland Delattre's *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* (1968);<sup>43</sup> and his typological worldview becomes semiotics in Stephen Daniel's *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards: A Study in Divine Semiotics* (1994).<sup>44</sup> Sang Hyun Lee's volume *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (1988)<sup>45</sup> points out that Edwards constructed a "dispositional ontology" that allowed him to support his theological positions with modern philosophical concepts.<sup>46</sup> Leon Chai agrees with Miller and shows how the structure and

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<sup>38</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 9, 62-3.

<sup>39</sup> Ola Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758: A Biography* (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1940).

<sup>40</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, The American Men of Letters Series (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1949).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Yarbrough, *Delightful Conviction: Jonathan Edwards and the Rhetoric of Conversion* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> Roland A. Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

<sup>44</sup> Stephen H. Daniel, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards: A Study in Divine Semiotics* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>46</sup> Stephen J. Stein, "The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards by Sang Hyun Lee," *Church History* 59, no. 1 (March 1990): 101.



limitations of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century philosophical argument shaped Edwards's work in *Jonathan Edwards and the Limits of Enlightenment Philosophy*.<sup>47</sup>

While Miller's view was cogent and influential, much ensuing scholarship tended to concentrate on showing the shortcomings in his opinion. Conrad Cherry's classic work *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (1966)<sup>48</sup> interpreted Edwards largely in relation to his Puritan and Calvinist forebears. Douglas Elwood's book *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (1960)<sup>49</sup> shows that Edwards's goal was to make possible the synthesis of science, philosophy and theology that was so urgently needed in his day. Harold Simonson avoids categorizing Edwards in *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Heart* (1974)<sup>50</sup> and focuses on the mystical impulse behind all that Edwards did and wrote. A biography by Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (1987),<sup>51</sup> falls into line with earlier Calvinist appreciations as does Robert Jenson's *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (1988).<sup>52</sup>

Volumes which provide considerable resources for ongoing scholarship include Patricia Tracy's *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (1980)<sup>53</sup> and John E. Smith's *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher* (1992),<sup>54</sup> which is a valuable introductory text to Edwards's thought and analyses several of his major treatises. William Sparkes Morris's book, *The Young Jonathan Edwards: A Reconstruction* (1991),<sup>55</sup> provides valuable insights into Edwards's formative years as revealed in his *Miscellanies*. William Scheick's study of *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards: Theme, Motif, and Style* (1975)<sup>56</sup> is a highly useful book which summarizes the

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<sup>47</sup> Leon Chai, *Jonathan Edwards and the Limits of Enlightenment Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Press, 1966).

<sup>49</sup> Douglas J. Elwood, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

<sup>50</sup> Harold P. Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Heart* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974).

<sup>51</sup> Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987).

<sup>52</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>53</sup> Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979).

<sup>54</sup> John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1992).

<sup>55</sup> William Sparkes Morris, *The Young Jonathan Edwards: A Reconstruction* (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, 1991).

<sup>56</sup> William J. Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards: Theme, Motif, and Style* (College Station, Texas: A & M University Press, 1975).

contents of Edwards's major writings and provides a chronological review of his works. In *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards* (1980),<sup>57</sup> Scheick has also brought together some of the best scholarship on Edwards to appear since Miller's biography, including important nineteenth-century responses to Edwards's thought.<sup>58</sup> M. X. Lesser's *Reading Jonathan Edwards; an Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729-2005*<sup>59</sup> contains articles, books, dissertations and reviews in chronological order. Norman Fiering's *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (1981)<sup>60</sup> and *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard* (1981)<sup>61</sup> provide the broadest intellectual context for evaluating Edwards. Michael McClymond uncovers the connection between Edwards the historian, the philosopher, the ethicist, the typologist and the preacher in *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (1998).<sup>62</sup>

A series of major conferences commencing at Wheaton in 1984 generated several volumes of specialized essays. Nathan Hatch and Harry Stout's edition *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (1988)<sup>63</sup> estimates Edwards's influence on American culture; Barbara Oberg and Harry Stout's publication *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture* (1993)<sup>64</sup> looks at Franklin and Edwards in a comparative framework; Stephen Stein's *Jonathan Edwards's Writings: Text, Context, Interpretation* (1996)<sup>65</sup> testifies to the relationship between his thought and practice on the one hand and eighteenth and nineteenth-century Anglo-American church history on the other; Sang Hyun Lee and Allen Guelzo's *Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion* (1999)<sup>66</sup> evaluates Edwards's relevance to contemporary issues.

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<sup>57</sup> William J. Scheick, ed., *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1980).

<sup>58</sup> Donald Weber, "Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards by William J. Scheick," *Early American Literature* 15, no. 3 (Winter 1980/81): 281-2.

<sup>59</sup> M.X. Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729-2005* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>60</sup> Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

<sup>61</sup> Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

<sup>62</sup> Michael J. McClymond, *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>63</sup> Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout, eds., *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>64</sup> Barbara B. Oberg and Harry S. Stout, eds., *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards and the Representation of American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>65</sup> Stephen J. Stein, ed., *Jonathan Edwards's Writings: Text, Context, Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

<sup>66</sup> Sang Hyun Lee and Allen C. Guelzo, eds., *Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999).

In the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, scholars have increasingly analysed Edwards's involvement in the major issues of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Gerald McDermott's *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (2000)<sup>67</sup> points out that Edwards dedicated his career to deism's destruction.<sup>68</sup> Robert Brown's *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (2002)<sup>69</sup> argues that Edwards's engagement with the emerging sciences forced him to defend the Bible's accuracy on "rational and empirical grounds."<sup>70</sup> Amy Plantinga Pauw's *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (2002)<sup>71</sup> provides a comprehensive treatment of Edwards's trinitarianism.

The 2003 Washington DC Library of Congress conference papers covering the fields of Edwards's theology of history, scripture, culture, society, and race are published in *Jonathan Edwards at 300: Essays on the Tercentenary of His Birth* (2005).<sup>72</sup> *The Contribution of Jonathan Edwards to American Culture and Society: Essays on America's spiritual founding father (The Northampton Tercentenary Celebrations, 1703-2003)* (2008)<sup>73</sup> contains contributions from participants on Edwards as a social and political philosopher. Several important publications appeared in 2003. *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (2003)<sup>74</sup> focuses on Edwards's theology and attempts to set him in the context of the history of Christian thought;<sup>75</sup> *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (2003)<sup>76</sup> presents new analytic philosophical and theological thinking on Edwards in a way that reflects Edwards's own concerns on the nexus of philosophy and theology; George Marsden's biography and winner of the Bancroft Prize, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (2003), offers a convincing picture

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<sup>67</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>69</sup> Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>71</sup> Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>72</sup> Harry S. Stout et al., eds., *Jonathan Edwards at 300: Essays on the Tercentenary of his Birth* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005).

<sup>73</sup> Richard A. S. Hall, ed., *The Contribution of Jonathan Edwards to American Culture and Society: Essays on America's Spiritual Founding Father (The Northampton Tercentenary Celebrations, 1703-2003)* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

<sup>74</sup> Sang Hyun Lee, ed., *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> Mark Valeri and Sang Hyun Lee, "The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 59, Issue 1 (January 2008): 162- 3.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp, eds., *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003).

of Edwards in his familial,<sup>77</sup> social, cultural, historical, literary, and religious context,<sup>78</sup> and Avihu Zakai's *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (2003) illuminates Edwards's life and writings in the context of the major scientific, historical and ethical trends of the Enlightenment;<sup>79</sup> *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (2003)<sup>80</sup> focuses primarily on the enduring influence of Edwards's writings worldwide.

Scholarship on Edwards since the tercentenary celebrations appears more narrowly focused. Philip Gura's biography *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical* (2005)<sup>81</sup> accentuates the deeply mystical understanding of the world that captivated Edwards. *Virtue Reformed: Rereading Jonathan Edwards's Ethics* (2005)<sup>82</sup> focuses on Edwards's ethics; Oliver Crisp's *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin* (2005)<sup>83</sup> evaluates the metaphysical underpinnings of Edwards's analysis of sin. Josh Moody argues that Edwards used Enlightenment concepts and language to further the Reformed theological tradition in *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment: Knowing the Presence of God* (2005).<sup>84</sup> Added to this are the expanding electronic resources on Edwards. Yale University Press established the *Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University (electronic resource)* in 2006<sup>85</sup> to make *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* accessible and provide resources that encourage critical appraisal of the historical importance and contemporary relevance of Jonathan Edwards. Also available online are the *Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*<sup>86</sup> and Gerald

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<sup>77</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 10.

<sup>78</sup> Michael J. McClymond, "Jonathan Edwards: A Life," *Church History* 76, no. 1 (March 2007): 207-10.

<sup>79</sup> Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of the Enlightenment," *Theology Today* 61, no. 3 (October 2004): 420-1.

<sup>80</sup> David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>81</sup> Philip F. Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: American Evangelical* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> Stephen A. Wilson, *Virtue Reformed: Rereading Jonathan Edwards's Ethics* (Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers, 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin* (Aldershot-Burlington, Virginia: Ashgate Publishing, 2005).

<sup>84</sup> Josh Moody, *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment: Knowing the Presence of God* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005).

<sup>85</sup> Jonathan Edwards Center, *The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University (electronic resource)* (2006), (accessed August 10, 2009). <http://edwards.yale.edu/>.

<sup>86</sup> Stephen J. Stein, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, (Cambridge Collections Online: Cambridge University Press, 2007), (accessed August 11, 2009). DOI:10.1017/CCOLO521852900.001.

McDermott's *Understanding Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America's Theologian* (2009).<sup>87</sup>

## V DEFINING THE RESEARCH: WORKS AND SCOPE

This thesis is an exercise in qualitative research where conclusions emerge from the research rather than the testing of an initial hypothesis. While the voluminous secondary literature on Edwards has been consulted throughout the thesis, the focus is the persona of the philosophical theologian Jonathan Edwards, as revealed in and through his personal writings. Edwards has been described as a theologian of the heart, yet “the heart of Edwards” has not been comprehensively examined, since most studies have been focussed on his philosophical theology and epistemology, not on his personal attributes. The aim of this thesis is to go beyond these much studied elements in order to discern those personal dimensions of his motivations and affections, and to assess how these were instrumental in defining the man. Therefore, the main primary literature for this study is that which will give insight into his explicitly recorded aspirations, plans, strategies, achievements and intimate reactions to personal developments within his public life.

Edwards detailed his immediate post-conversion aspirations and intended disciplines for personal piety and conduct in his *Resolutions*. He followed up these resolutions by recording his degree of attainment of these goals in his *Diary*. Consequently, these two volumes of 1722-25 give a clear idea of his early aspirations and the disciplined approach he adopted with reference to both their attainment and their assessment. His many *Letters* (1716-58) provide the personal outpouring of the heart of Edwards as he expressed his innermost hopes, fears and frustrations to close confidants. Similarly, his later *Personal Narrative* (c.1740) traces the development of his quest after holiness and his self-assessment of that quest.

Edwards's primary regulatory notebooks for sermon composition, *Subjects of Enquiry* (c.1746-51) and *Sermon Notebook 45* (c.1738-1756),<sup>88</sup> along with his foundational “Cover-Leaf Memoranda” of 1723-26, address matters of style and literary technique and provide a clear indication of Edwards's intentional strategy to manage his burgeoning literary career. *A Copy of a Covenant Entered into and Subscribed by the People of God at Northampton*,

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<sup>87</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *Understanding Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America's Theologian* (electronic resource) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Oxford Scholarship Online, (accessed August 10, 2009). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195373431.001.0001>.

<sup>88</sup> Wilson H. Kimnach, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses, 1720-1723*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 62, 68 n5.

*and Owned before God in His House As their Vow to the Lord, and Made a Solemn Act of Public worship, by the Congregation in general That were Above Fourteen Years of Age, on a Day of Fasting and Prayer for the Continuance and Increase of the Gracious Presence of God in that Place*, March 16, 1741/2,<sup>89</sup> drafted by Edwards, is both a remarkable constitution for a model town and a mirror image of Edwards's own beliefs and practices.

In the text of Edwards's sermons we are given perhaps the most vivid insights into the inner workings of Edwards's mind. Some of the most telling sermons from this perspective are *God Glorified in Man's Dependence* (1731), *The Excellency of Christ* (1737), *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741), and *A Farewell Sermon Preached at the First Precinct in Northampton, After the People's Public Rejection of Their Minister on June 22, 1750*. These sermons depict the immediacy of the man as he confronted the real and intensely disturbing issues of his day, at the time they arose. Many of his later treatises had their genesis in these more spontaneous sermons, refined at later stages into more formal treatises for wider circulation. While these later treatises were more considered literary works, they also provide very orderly and detailed accounts of the inner workings of Edwards's heart and mind. Some of the more significant treatises are *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton* (1737), *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present State of Revival in New England* (1742) and *Religious Affections* (1746).

## **VI DEVELOPING THE ARGUMENT**

### *Introduction. The Elusive Jonathan Edwards*

The introduction presents a review of the formative influences in Edwards's background and his place in the scholarly literature.

### *Chapter 1. Edwards's Concept of and Submission to an Absolute Authority*

A key aspect of self-fashioning is the conceptualization of an absolute power or authority situated beyond the self. In Edwards's context, this authority is God and Edwards's developing concept of the absoluteness of God in his sovereignty is pivotal to an appreciation of the development of Edwards's persona. This chapter investigates Edwards's somewhat Augustinian struggle to come to terms with the "horrible doctrine of God's sovereignty" and

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<sup>89</sup> George S. Claghorn, ed., Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to the Reverend Thomas Prince," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 16 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 121-3.

the transforming impact of this development on Edwards himself as he sought to re-fashion himself in light of this new sense of God's absolute sovereignty.

#### *Chapter 2. The External Threatening Other*

In taking this stand on God's sovereignty, Edwards found himself immediately and constantly confronted with various conflicting worldviews which would undermine his position and which he would feel compelled to resist. These included the pervasive Enlightenment, secular benevolist moral philosophy and ethics and natural philosophy, as well as the more specifically religious elements of Deism, Arminianism, French Roman Catholicism and the great Puritan nemesis, Anglicanism. Edwards thus waged constant combat with these British and Continental forces which were invading the colony. This helped shape Edwards's persona and determined the means by which he fought back and expressed himself. This chapter reviews how Edwards engaged the specific worldviews in terms of both what he read and what he wrote as evidence of his emerging persona.

#### *Chapter 3. The Internal Threatening Other*

As well as the invasive threats detailed in the above chapter, Edwards was confronted by local factors which generated a degree of chaos or disorder. The Awakenings of the colony generated much emotionalism which was offensive to the establishment's sense of order. While endorsing revival, and adopting multiple roles in orchestrating, directing and controlling the movement, Edwards found himself uncomfortably placed in the as yet unordered world between the established Old Lights clergy and the over-zealous Enthusiasts. Typically, Edwards sought by various literary means to craft a more reflective defence of revivalism to give coherence to the various narratives of revival. The control he sought to achieve was thus both a factor in and a product of the maturational process of his persona. He progressively disciplined himself in his letters, sermons and treatises to project a greater sense of reputable credibility as a means of gaining more control over proponents and opponents of the revivals.

#### *Chapter 4. One Man's Authority is Another Man's Alien*

In attempting to exercise the authority of his office, Edwards came into conflict with his own Northampton congregation, who rejected his notion of authority as inimical to their situation. Specifically, the contest centred on the "Halfway Covenant" controversy, where Edwards opposed Stoddard's inclusive attitude to communion and insisted on excluding the nominal and unconverted. This clash of authorities led ultimately to Edwards's dismissal from the

church and his exile from Northampton, another factor in the process of his self-fashioning. This chapter analyses the conflict resulting from the Halfway Covenant controversy, which demonstrates how the fully developed persona of Edwards the self-assured authoritative theological and ecclesial leader was clearly manifest.

#### *Chapter 5. The Development of Edwards's Literary Persona*

Following the delineation of the various themes and issues which dominated Edwards's thought (chapters 1-4), this chapter turns from the "what" of his thought to the "how" of his writing. At all times, Edwards realized that the impact of his beliefs would be rendered most powerful through his pen. Hence Edwards the writer was as important as Edwards the pastor, and more significantly for this thesis, was a key agent in the formulation of his public persona. This chapter focuses on this literary aspect of Edwards, not as a study of his literary talents *per se*, but as a study of his use of literature as a deliberate tool in the crafting of his public persona.

#### *Chapter 6. Turning Points: the Persona Established*

At significant turning points, Edwards's efforts to address the issues he faced involved him in a process of self-transformation that he believed would empower him to resolve the conflicts. For Edwards, self-fashioning involved some effacement, some loss of self. In developing an intentional persona, Edwards forsook some of what was innate in his nature and attempted to exercise the autocratic authority of his predecessor. This chapter reviews Edwards's vocational life in several stages which demonstrate the formation and consolidation of his public persona to the point of its mature expression at Stockbridge.

#### *Chapter 7. Conclusion: Understanding Edwards the Man*

This concluding chapter brings together the various strands of the foregoing chapters in an overall assessment of the significance of Edwards's self-fashioning for an appreciation of his overall contribution to the history of Christian thought and practice. Far from being simply the singular champion of Calvinistic orthodoxy as so often depicted, Edwards was also a unique and very deliberately self-fashioned theological thinker and ecclesiastical leader. He was shaped by numerous things beyond himself, such as pervasive doctrines and conflicts which dominated the eighteenth-century New England landscape. However, it was his intense personal experience that established the distinctive platform for his response to these forces, a platform on which he deliberately, strategically and successfully fashioned his own persona and to a large degree determined his own success.



# CHAPTER 1

## EDWARDS'S CONCEPT OF AND SUBMISSION TO AN ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY

### I INTRODUCTION

A key aspect of self-fashioning is the conceptualization of an absolute power or authority situated beyond the self.<sup>1</sup> In Edwards's context, this authority is God and Edwards's developing concept of the absoluteness of God in his sovereignty is pivotal to an appreciation of the development of Edwards's persona. This chapter will investigate (1) Edwards's somewhat Augustinian struggle to come to terms with the "horrible doctrine of God's sovereignty"; (2) how the morphology of Edwards's conversion experience with its focus on God's sovereignty was not the normal Puritan morphology; and (3) the transforming impact of this development on Edwards himself.

### II THE "HORRIBLE DOCTRINE" OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

#### (a) *Early Years*

Jonathan Edwards was concerned about his soul's salvation all through his childhood and he was involved in many "religious duties." His affections were "lively and easily moved" and he was "in his element when involved in the things of religion."<sup>2</sup> In 1712, in the midst of the "awakenings" in East Windsor where his father Timothy was the pastor, Edwards and some of his school friends "built a prayer booth in the swamp in a very secret and retired place, for a place of prayer," and besides this he had a "secret place in the woods" for his sole use.<sup>3</sup> Even at such a young age, these ingenuous activities were an expression of his childlike concept of an absolute, transcendent God who was to be feared. This accorded with the prevailing notions of God's sovereignty, which saw God as "choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell."<sup>4</sup> However, despite his earnest religious involvement, Edwards felt considerable unease and anxiety with regard to such apparent arbitrariness. Added to this was the constant ebb and flow of his "affections" and "delight" and his return

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 9.

<sup>2</sup> George S. Claghorn, ed., Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 16 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 790-1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 791.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 792.

“like a dog to his vomit ... in sin.” Edwards thus concluded that he was numbered among the unregenerate and lived in a state of spiritual uncertainty, if not anguish, in his early years.

Edwards was afflicted with serious illness at the time of his greatest resistance to the doctrine of God’s Sovereignty in 1719-20, when he was sixteen. “It pleased God, in my last year of college, at a time when I was in the midst of many uneasy thoughts about the state of my soul, to seize me with a pleurisy; in which he brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell.”<sup>5</sup> His sinful life, he feared, had brought him to the doors of death. He tried to re-shape himself by renouncing his former ways and obey the Lord’s word, but the attempt was short-lived. Soon after recovering from his first serious illness, he “fell again into his old ways of sin” which led to “great and violent struggles; till after many conflicts with wicked inclinations, and repeated resolutions, and bonds that I laid myself under by a kind of vows to God, I was brought wholly to break off all former wicked ways, and all ways of known outward sin .... I made seeking my salvation the main business of my life.”<sup>6</sup> Despite such ongoing vacillation, he continued in a state of turmoil, dissatisfied with his spiritual state, “miserable,” devoid of “lively affections or delight.”

When Edwards moved to New Haven to complete his undergraduate studies in 1719, he was presented with what he regarded as the ideal Christian existence. He met Sarah Pierpont, a young girl who spent her time communing with God and expecting to be taken up to heaven to be with her God and “to be ravished by his love forever.”<sup>7</sup> Sarah exhibited a radically different understanding of an individual’s relationship with God. Affable, equable, constantly joyful and open to God’s manifestations to her at a personal level and giving free and overt expression to her love of God, Sarah seemed incapable of doing anything wrong or sinful and she displayed an openness to God that was a new experience for Edwards to behold. In Sarah, Edwards encountered not the remote private concept of God’s awful sovereignty, but the dynamic and overt joy of a willing submission to and enjoyment of God’s loving sovereignty.

Edwards was so impressed by Sarah’s idealistic way of life that he wrote a tribute to her on the “blank endpaper of a book that he probably presented to her.”<sup>8</sup> This writing, penned in 1723 when he was twenty and Sarah thirteen, tells us a great deal about Edwards’s desires and longings in the crucial time of his life when he was seeking answers to his concerns

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 791.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 791.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “On Sarah Pierpont,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 789-90.

<sup>8</sup> Claghorn, *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 745.

about the doctrine of God's sovereignty. In Sarah Pierpont, Edwards saw the very qualities of life of which he was bereft. It seemed that this thirteen year old girl stood on the other side of a deep abyss waiting for him to take the leap of faith that would enable him to enjoy her state of intimacy with God. She provided him with an experiential axiom, a self-evident truth that enabled him to understand that he lived in a God-filled universe, where he could embrace God.

(b) *Apostrophe to Sarah Pierpont*

They say there is a young lady in [New Haven] who is beloved of that almighty Being, who made and rules the world, and that there are certain seasons in which this great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight, and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on him – that she expects after a while to be received up where he is, to be raised out of the world and caught up into heaven; being assured that he loves her too well to let her remain at a distance from him always. There she is to dwell with him, and to be ravished with his love, favour and delight, forever. Therefore, if you present all the world before her, with the richest of its treasures, she disregards it and cares not for it, and is unmindful of any pain or affliction. She has a strange sweetness in her mind, and sweetness of temper, uncommon purity in her affections; is most praiseworthy in all her actions; and you could not persuade her to do anything thought wrong or sinful, if you would give her all the world, lest she should offend this great Being. She is of a wonderful sweetness, calmness and universal benevolence of mind; especially after those times in which this great God has manifested himself to her mind. She will sometimes go about, singing sweetly, from place to [place]; and seems to be always full of joy and pleasure; and no one knows for what. She loves to be alone, and to wander in the fields and on the mountains, and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her.<sup>9</sup>

Sarah Pierpont thus provided Edwards with a demonstrable contrast. On the one hand stood his own inner conflicts about God's sovereignty and the doctrinal orthodoxy he had inherited; on the other was the irrefutable experiential vivacity of Sarah. In all of this was his desire to resolve the problems which hindered his intimacy with God. Sarah seemed to embody a self-

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<sup>9</sup> Edwards, "On Sarah Pierpont," 789-90.

evident truth about God that he could not deny any more than he could deny the validity of his own experience, which at that point in time had left him wanting.

(c) *Pathway to Conversion*

Edwards's "great and violent inward struggles, conflicts and wicked inclinations" increased during his undergraduate studies from 1716-1720 at the Connecticut Collegiate School, located first at Wethersfield then at New Haven, as did his efforts to resolve them. In 1721, Edwards desperately sought salvation "in a manner that he never had before." He resolved to "part with all things in the world for an interest in Christ."<sup>10</sup> This volitional determination led to a reordering of his priorities which proved to be his turning point, as God's formerly remote and terrible sovereignty became personal and welcome: in short, he was converted.<sup>11</sup> Edwards's doubts and objections to divine sovereignty dissolved "without his quite knowing why."<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after this Edwards noted when reading 1 Timothy 1:17:

there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before. I thought how excellent a Being that was; and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapt up to God in heaven; and be as it were swallowed up in him... I prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do; with a new sort of affection."<sup>13</sup>

The transforming effects of his "new sense" were immediate. His new sense of the "glory of the divine being" became the ground of his consent to the moral authority of God. His quest was transformed from seeking intellectual satisfaction and personal benefit to a contemplation of God in Christ, and his place and role in the world. With it came the realization that the material world of which he was a minute particle was God's self-

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<sup>10</sup> Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 791.

<sup>11</sup> According to Walter Conn, conversion involves "the radical reorientation of one's entire life that occurs when God is allowed to move from the periphery to the centre of one's being, signifying the total self-surrender regarding the illusion of a human being having absolute autonomy. Conversion signifies a transformation of the person's whole orientation and constitutes a radically new beginning in one's life; the total reconstruction of the self according to the quest after transcendence. Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 30-1.

<sup>12</sup> Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 792.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 792-3.

revelation and self-communication to his creatures of his own “perfections” and “excellency.”<sup>14</sup>

Edwards accepted that his life existed in God’s life and that he could participate in God’s life on God’s terms if he so desired and gain his “interest in Christ.” His approach to God changed from the childlike prayer in the woods addressed to an august but distant deity to a focus on the person of Christ as the manifestation of an engaging sovereign. His “vehement longing of soul after God and Christ, and after more holiness”<sup>15</sup> engaged him in spending more time “in reading and meditating on Christ; and the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation, by free grace in him.”<sup>16</sup> He became “convinced, and fully satisfied, as to God’s sovereignty, and his justice in thus eternally disposing of men, according to his sovereign pleasure.”<sup>17</sup> His reason now “apprehended the justice and reasonableness of God.” His “objections” were completely transformed into “a *delightful* conviction” about God’s sovereignty. The doctrine “appeared, an exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet doctrine to me: and absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God.”<sup>18</sup>

(d) *Release from Fear*

As Edwards’s “sense of divine things gradually increased,” it also became more and more lively and had more of what he felt as an inward sweetness:

The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God’s excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature.<sup>19</sup>

This freed Edwards of his childhood fear of thunder storms:

Formerly, nothing had been so terrible to me. I used to be a person uncommonly terrified with thunder; and it used to strike me with terror. But now, on the contrary, it rejoiced me. I felt God at the first appearance of a thunderstorm. And used to take the opportunity at such times, to fix myself to view the clouds, and

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas A. Schafer, ed., Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany 99,” in *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500), The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 13 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 267-8.

<sup>15</sup> Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” 794.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 793.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 792.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 792.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 794.

see the lightning play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder; which often times was exceeding entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God.<sup>20</sup>

Edwards's new perspective convinced him that he was numbered among the regenerate and this gave him great satisfaction with his "good estate."

Edwards spent increasing amounts of time walking alone in nature, meditating, praying, and conversing with God in much the same manner as Sarah Pierpont who loved "to be alone, and to wander in the fields and on the mountains." The enjoyment he felt was "of an exceedingly different kind" from those he had experienced as a boy. They were "more inward, pure, soul-animating and refreshing."<sup>21</sup> His former delights had been cerebrally sought and whimsically pursued, but they "never reached the heart; and did not arise from any sight of the divine excellency of the things of God; or any taste of the soul-satisfying, and life-giving good, there is in them."<sup>22</sup> Now, however, his present enjoyments of "heart" religion or "affections," and seeing God's "beauty, excellency and holiness," became his criterion for salvation, for himself and for the congregations he pastored. His concept of God's sovereignty was now dynamic. He saw it operationally as a conviction of personal inability, but with a new sense of the heart and the idea of being swallowed up by the beauty, excellency, and holiness of God. Edwards went so far as to edit his *Personal Narrative* (c.1740) to fit his prescription of the model saint, avoiding anything that hinted not only at enthusiasm but also of works of righteousness.<sup>23</sup> He saw its didactic use and had high hopes that his readers would adopt his exemplary experience.

### III MORPHOLOGY OF CONVERSION

#### (a) Stoddard's "Terror"

Jonathan Edwards inherited a tradition which occupied itself with analysing the conversion experience. The Puritans of both Old England and New England regarded the Christian life as beginning with an experience of personal conversion. They charted the course by which the individual arrived at that experience and progressed through stages which could be distinguished from the next. Thomas Hooker (1586-1647), Thomas Shepard (1604-49) and other founding fathers of New England offered "rich and intricate analysis of the stages on

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 794.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 794-5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 795

<sup>23</sup> Claghorn, *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 748.

the way to conversion.”<sup>24</sup> They established for themselves a morphology of conversion that provided believers with the ability – as they thought – to check the progress of their eternal condition through various stages “by a set of temporal and recognizable signs.”<sup>25</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, the steps to conversion had become fixed to the point where applicants for church membership appeared to be filling out a set form.<sup>26</sup> Edmund Morgan has summarized the traditional pattern:

First comes a feeble and false awakening to God’s commands and a pride in keeping them pretty well, but also much backsliding. Disappointments and disasters lead to other fitful hearkenings to the word. Sooner or later true legal fear or conviction enables the individual to see his hopeless and helpless condition and to know that his own righteousness cannot save him, that Christ is his only hope. Thereafter comes the infusion of saving grace, sometimes but not always so precisely felt that the believer can state exactly when and where it came to him. A struggle between faith and doubt ensues, with the candidate careful to indicate that his assurance has never been complete and that his sanctification has been much hampered by his own sinful heart.<sup>27</sup>

Edwards’s grandfather Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729) continued this tradition. Stoddard called the roll of an impressive, not to say awesome, gathering of authorities, as marching beneath his standard: “*Hildersham, Perkins, Dod, Sibbs, Bain, Dike, Ball, Preston, Hooker, Shepard, Norton* whose judgment in matters of this nature does outweigh the judgment of thousand[s] of others, though otherwise learned men.”<sup>28</sup> He served as the spokesman for the western half of Massachusetts. According to legend, Stoddard aspired to be the “pope” of the Connecticut Valley. He was a formidable presence, a large impressive man and a powerful preacher famed for his speaking without notes.<sup>29</sup> In Stoddard’s formulation of the morphology of conversion, “terror” became a virtual synonym for humiliation.<sup>30</sup> “We learn by *experience*,” Stoddard wrote in his *Guide to Christ* (1714), in Edwards’s time a standard handbook for use in guiding people through conversion,

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<sup>24</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), 155.

<sup>25</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca: New York, 1965), 66.

<sup>26</sup> C. C. Goen, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 4 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1972), 26.

<sup>27</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, 91.

<sup>28</sup> Solomon Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ* (Boston: 1714), 5. Cited in David Laurence, “Jonathan Edwards, Solomon Stoddard, and the Preparationist Model of Conversion,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 72, no. 3/4 (July-October, 1979): 269.

<sup>29</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 11-12.

<sup>30</sup> Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ*, 269.

that men's hearts are generally set for carnal things before they are terrified, and for their own Righteousness before they see [the corruption of] their own hearts. Generally, such men as have not had the *terrors* of God in them, don't much mind Eternal things.<sup>31</sup>

Stoddard advised ministers who counselled the person who came to them proclaiming acceptance of Christ and experience of grace, "Special Enquiry is to be made, [1] What condition he was in just before, whether he was wholly emptied of himself, or found any imaginary goodness in himself; if his humiliation was right, there is no doubt."<sup>32</sup>

(b) *Edwards's Experience*

Edwards believed there was a marked discrepancy between what he had experienced and what theorists of conversion – especially his esteemed grandfather – said he ought to experience. He noted that it never seemed appropriate to express his concern that he had, "by the name of terror."<sup>33</sup> This failure to experience "terror,"<sup>34</sup> which Stoddard had insisted on as essential to true conversion, further vexed Edwards at this point. It was this received tradition of the proper conversion process that caused the young Edwards to feel so spiritually inadequate, as he could not in good conscience tick the boxes on the prescribed form. On December 18, 1722, he wrote in his *Diary*:

The reason why I, in the least, question my interest in God's love and favour, is,  
1. Because I cannot speak so fully to my experience of that preparatory work, of which divines speak; 2. I do not remember that I experienced regeneration, exactly in those steps, in which divines say it is generally wrought; 3. I do not feel the Christian graces sensibly enough, particularly faith.<sup>35</sup>

Again on August 12, 1723 Edwards wrote in his *Diary*:

The chief thing that now makes me in any measure to question my good estate, is my not having experienced conversion in those particular steps, wherein the people of New England, and anciently the Dissenters of Old England, used to experience it. Wherefore, now resolved, never to leave searching, till I have

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<sup>31</sup> Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ*, 88.

<sup>33</sup> Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 791.

<sup>34</sup> Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Diary," in Claghorn, *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 759.



satisfyingly found out the very and bottom and foundation, the real reason, why they used to be converted in those steps.”<sup>36</sup>

(c) *Re-shaping the Morphology*

Typically, Edwards was not prepared to live with this doctrine-experience dichotomy, so he set out to re-fashion the morphology of conversion he had inherited, based on his new model of sainthood. His way forward emerged in a dialectical development which pitted inherited doctrines (of Stoddard and normative Puritanism) against lived experience (of both himself and, increasingly, Sarah). This produced a formative tension which would generate a new synthesis, a new ideal which would shape Edwards’s thought and to which he could work to conform himself.

Edwards could possibly have understood his case to fall within the range deemed authentic according to the well-established conventions that he was indoctrinated into but he challenged the authoritativeness of the step-by-step model.<sup>37</sup> He determined that his search for God was not achieved through a broken, terrified soul or an agonized spiritual crisis of great magnitude and proportions which were common themes in traditional Puritan conversion narratives. He made this *a priori* the basis for an enquiry that eventually led him to reject the step-by-step model of conversion on which New England’s thought and practice were based,<sup>38</sup> and to establish a different concept of authentic spiritual conversion based on what he had learned by experience.

Edwards’s morphology of conversion clearly emerges in a set of “Directions for Judging of Persons’ Experiences” that he compiled, based on the essential elements of his own unique conversion experience as recorded in his *Personal Narrative*:

See to it that the operation be much upon the will or heart, not on the imagination, nor on the speculative understanding, or motions of the mind, though they draw great affections after ‘em as the consequence .... That under their seeming convictions it be sin indeed; that they are convinced of their guilt in offending and affronting so great a God ... That it is truly conviction of sin that convinces them of the justice of God in their damnation ... That there is to be discerned in their

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 779.

<sup>37</sup> Laurence, “Jonathan Edwards, Solomon Stoddard, and the Preparationist Model of Conversion,” 268.

<sup>38</sup> David Laurence rightly sees Edwards’s rejection of his grandfather’s open communion practice as a consequence of a critical re-evaluation of the step-by-step model upon which New England thought and practice had been based. Laurence, “Jonathan Edwards, Solomon Stoddard, and the Preparationist Model of Conversion,” 267-9.

sense of the sufficiency of Christ, a sense of that divine, supreme, and spiritual excellency of Christ, wherein this sufficiency fundamentally consists; and that the sight of this excellency is really the foundation of their satisfaction as to his sufficiency .... Whether their experience have a respect to practice in these ways. That their behaviour at present seems to be agreeable to such experiences ... Makes a disposition to ill practices dreadful. Makes 'em long after perfect freedom from sin, and after those things wherein *holiness* consists.<sup>39</sup>

In *Religious Affections* (1746), where he wrestles with the question of how God's presence can be discerned in an individual's life, Edwards explicitly repudiated the old morphology by making the *nature* of one's spiritual experiences rather than their *order* the discriminating factor in determining whether or not they were gracious. He wrote,

We are often in Scripture expressly directed to try ourselves by the nature of the fruits of the Spirit, but nowhere by the Spirit's method of producing them ... that indeed is the clearest work (not where the order of doing is clearest, but), where the spiritual and divine nature of the work done, and effect wrought, is most clear.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly in *Religious Affections* he wrote, "And as a seeming to have this distinctness as to steps and method, is no certain sign that a person is converted; so being without it is no evidence that a person is not converted."<sup>41</sup> He further declared that "no order or method of operations and experiences is any certain sign of their divinity."<sup>42</sup>

#### IV THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDWARDS

##### (a) *Preliminary Discomforts*

In 1722, approximately a year and half after his conversion, Edwards went to preach to a small Presbyterian congregation in New York. His longings after God and holiness increased. He felt

a burning desire to be a complete Christian; and conformed to the blessed image of Christ; and that I might live in all things according to the gospel. I had an eager thirsting after progress in these things. My longings after it, put me upon pursuing

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<sup>39</sup> Alexander B. Grosart, ed., *Selections from the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh, 1865), 183-185. Cited in *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 28.

<sup>40</sup> John E. Smith, ed., Jonathan Edwards, "Religious Affections," in *Jonathan Edwards Religious Affections*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 162-3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

and pressing after them. It was my continual strife day and night, and constant enquiry, how I should be more holy, and live more holily, and more becoming a child of God, and disciple of Christ.<sup>43</sup>

Edwards could not resist assisting God in his pursuit of holiness. To this end he began compiling his *Resolutions* and *Diary* and early *Miscellanies*. “I used to be continually examining myself and studying and contriving for likely ways and means how I should live more holily, with far greater diligence and earnestness.”<sup>44</sup>

While in New York (1722-1723), Edwards frequently retired “to a solitary place, on the banks of Hudson’s River, at some distance from the city, for “contemplation on divine things, and secret converse with God, and had many sweet hours there.”<sup>45</sup> Traditionally, mainstream Puritans were anthropocentric. “Edwards shifted attention away from the self and toward the self’s perception of God. The character of Edwards’s spirituality was both always theocentric and contemplative.”<sup>46</sup> He spent enormous amounts of time in nature meditating on God’s character and God’s creation. For Edwards, this activity was an act of worship. His desire and willingness to set apart extended periods of time to be alone with God demonstrates God’s worth to Edwards. If this was the only activity he could engage in, he considered it time not only well spent but most productive for his literary endeavours. Edwards’s mind was “greatly fixed on divine things.” He was almost perpetually in “the contemplation of them.” He spent most of his time “year after year” in “thinking of divine things.” He spent time “walking alone in the woods, and solitary places for meditation, soliloquy and prayer, and converse with God.” At such times he “sang forth” his contemplations, and constantly prayed “ejaculatory” prayers.<sup>47</sup> Seeking and seeing God took precedence over all else for Edwards. Complete absorption in God, rapt enjoyment of the divine sweetness and forgetfulness of one’s self – here in a nutshell was Edwards’s spiritual ideal.<sup>48</sup>

Prior to his conversion experience, Edwards’s focus had been his inner fears and failures. After his conversion, his ongoing and growing perception of God in the universe led him to

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<sup>43</sup> Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” 795.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 795.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 795-7.

<sup>46</sup> Michael J. McClymond, *Encounters With God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 38, 46.

<sup>47</sup> Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” 795.

<sup>48</sup> McClymond, *Encounters With God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 48.

activism. He acknowledged his sins and meditated deeply on repenting of them.<sup>49</sup> After reflecting in tears on his past “wicked” life and what he regarded as his late start along the pathway of “true religion,” Edwards rededicated his life to God and thus commenced a deliberate process of re-shaping himself in accordance with his new understanding of God’s nature and purposes.

On January 12, 1723 I made a solemn dedication of myself to God, and wrote it down; giving up myself, and all that I had to God; to be for the future in no respect my own; to act as one that had no right to himself, in any respect. And solemnly vowed to take God for my whole portion and felicity; looking on nothing else as any part of my happiness; nor acting as if it were; and his law for the constant rule of my obedience; engaging to fight with all my might, against the world, the flesh, and the devil. To the end of my life.”<sup>50</sup>

Here was more than intellectual and vocal acquiescence to truths revealed in scripture; here Edwards devoted his all to God.

By April 1723, Edwards’s New York pastorate ended and he returned to East Windsor to prepare his Master’s *Quaestio*, which he delivered in September to receive his Master of Arts degree. Later that same year, he accepted a position at a small church at Bolton until his election to a tutorship at Yale the following year. His stay at Yale as a tutor was not a happy one. “I sunk in religion; my mind being diverted from my eager and violent pursuits after holiness, by some affairs that greatly perplexed and distracted my mind.”<sup>51</sup> Tutoring at Yale was not conducive to his personal spiritual health or physical well being. In September of 1725, he became so ill that initially he was unable to make it home to East Windsor and he lay sick for several months being cared for by his mother and other family members. After a long convalescence, he returned in the early summer of 1726 to the tutorship at New Haven and again this occupation intruded into his contemplative activities. He was “greatly diverted by temporal concerns” that occupied his thoughts and greatly wounded his soul.<sup>52</sup> One can only conclude that Edwards was overrun by people and their educational needs on campus at Yale and this swallowed up all his time.

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<sup>49</sup> Hambrick-Stowe suggests that a “dynamic two-part cycle of emptying and filling characterized the whole of Puritan spirituality.” Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 79.

<sup>50</sup> Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” 796-797.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 798.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 799.

(b) *Northampton and Revivals*

In late August of 1726, Edwards was invited by the Northampton church to assist his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. Resigning his tutorship at Yale, Edwards eagerly accepted the position. He was greatly impressed by Stoddard's "extraordinary success in the conversion of many souls." During his sixty year pastorate, there were five "harvests:" 1679, 1683, 1696, 1712 and 1718.<sup>53</sup> Despite this, in young Jonathan Edwards's opinion, the Northampton congregation had imbibed a quite mistaken notion of conversion. The congregation at Northampton reflected his grandfather's understanding of sainthood, not his, and many had also unwittingly embraced the heretical Arminian understanding of humanity's role in the salvation process.<sup>54</sup>

Evidence of Edwards's dynamic concept of God's sovereignty was absent from the lives of Northampton parishioners. Yet even so, assisting his grandfather in the pastorate was much more conducive to his own spiritual growth than tutoring at Yale. From his arrival in 1726 in Northampton, Edwards found he possessed an inward sweetness,

that used, as it were, to carry me away in my contemplations; in what I know not how to express otherwise, than by a calm, sweet abstraction of soul from all the concerns o[f] this world; and a kind of vision, or fixed ideas and imaginations, of being alone in the mountains, or some solitary wilderness, far from all mankind, sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapt and swallowed up in God. The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden as it were, kindle up a sweet burning in my heart; an ardour of my soul that I know not how to express.<sup>55</sup>

These ongoing experiences clarified for Edwards the model saint's pathway to God and eternal bliss.

The year 1727 was an outstanding year for Edwards. In February, he was ordained at Northampton as assistant pastor to his grandfather and in July, he married Sarah Pierpont at New Haven. Twelve months later, the first of Jonathan and Sarah's eleven children was born, and in the following year, 1729, Stoddard died, leaving his grandson as the senior pastor of the prestigious Northampton church. In 1731, Edwards made his Boston debut. He was asked to preach the "Thursday lecture," which coincided with the Harvard commencement when

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<sup>53</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9.

<sup>55</sup> Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 793.

Boston was filled with clergy.<sup>56</sup> The establishment concluded that the truth was in good hands in the grandson of Solomon Stoddard who chose his anti-Arminian topic, *God Glorified in the Works of Redemption by the Greatness of Man's Dependence Upon Him, in the whole of it*. With Stoddard's successor standing on the threshold of his career and "his face set against the Arminian threat," the awakenings began.<sup>57</sup>

Edwards's reputation increased as "awakenings" broke out in Northampton and the Connecticut Valley in 1734-35. His personal role was astonishing. The town seemed to be "made over in his image, which was no small feat in the light of his perfectionist standards and spiritual intensity."<sup>58</sup> Edwards regarded his anti-Arminian stance as igniting the Valley revivals and listed thirty-two other communities in the Connecticut River Valley which experienced awakenings. In most cases, he seems to have thought that the igniting spark came from his own congregation.<sup>59</sup> During the 1734-35 awakening, most clergy followed Edwards's lead in rejecting pre-awakening ideas of conversion as based in varying degrees on Arminian presuppositions.<sup>60</sup> The publication of *A Faithful Narrative* in 1736 brought Edwards international attention.

The period between the awakenings of 1734-35 and 1740 discouraged Edwards and he struggled to retrieve the "halcyon days" when Northampton was "A City set on a Hill."<sup>61</sup> He was determined that the decline of holiness in his congregation would not erode his own "good estate." He often rode off on his horse into the woods for contemplation and renewal. On one occasion in 1737, he stated that he

had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God; as mediator between God and man; and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek gentle condescension. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent, with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 140.

<sup>57</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 158.

<sup>59</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 21.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>61</sup> On Easter Monday, 1630, John Winthrop, governor of the Company of Massachusetts, set sail aboard the *Arbella* carrying mostly Puritan colonizers to their newly chartered colony in New England. Winthrop's well known exhortation that they were to be a "City Set on a Hill," a shining example to England and the world, was reflected in plans for a biblical commonwealth to be grounded in laws and principles gleaned from the Scriptures. Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600-1850. The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (London & New York: Routledge Publishers, 1999), 11.

<sup>62</sup> Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 801.

This continued for about an hour and Edwards spent most of the time “in a flood of tears and weeping aloud.”<sup>63</sup> The very issue that Edwards had wrestled with: the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased, leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell, transformed into “sweet and glorious doctrines” for Edwards. “These doctrines have been much my delight. God’s sovereignty has ever appeared to me, as great part of his glory. It has often been sweet to me to go to God, and adore him as a sovereign God, and ask sovereign mercy of him.”<sup>64</sup>

Edwards’s inability to share these quasi-epiphanic experiences which became the essence of his conversionist theology with the Northampton congregation no doubt contributed to a deep gulf that would fully emerge when the fervour of the 1740-42 Awakening subsided. New England churches were a mixed multitude, with their outward religious life characterized largely by “moral homilies in the pulpit, do(ing) good piety, and complacent self confidence in the pew.”<sup>65</sup> Edwards saw no evidence of God’s sovereignty in the unregenerate congregation members. They had no conviction of personal inability, did not possess a new sense of the heart and could not entertain the idea of being swallowed up by the beauty, excellency, and holiness of God. Out of desperation Edwards invited George Whitefield, the “fiery itinerant” of some reputation, to visit Northampton during his visit to the colonies.<sup>66</sup>

George Whitefield (1714-71) began his tour at Newport, Rhode Island and then went on to Boston and New York and north to Maine. He then travelled overland to Northampton on his preaching tour, bringing Edwards’s longed for results. New England was once again ablaze with revival and awakenings beyond compare with anything previously experienced.<sup>67</sup> Edwards observed that, compared with those in 1734-35, “new conversions were frequently wrought more sensibly and visibly; the impressions stronger and more manifest by external effects of them,” and “it was a very frequent thing to see an house full of outcries, faintings, convulsions and such like, both with distress, and also with admiration and joy.”<sup>68</sup> For Edwards, these were all dynamic evidences of God’s sovereign activity in the life of the people. All night meetings multiplied – sometimes not by design but simply because people

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 801.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 799.

<sup>65</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 17.

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend George Whitefield,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 79-81.

<sup>67</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 48-9.

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Rev. Thomas Prince,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 115-25.

found themselves too wrung out emotionally to travel home. Visions and trances appeared. People began to claim immediate inspiration for occasionally bizarre behaviour. This was labelled “enthusiasm,” an awful threat to orthodox Puritans.<sup>69</sup> Many feared the revival was out of control and increasingly Edwards saw the need to defend it.

At the Commencement address at Yale College on September 10, 1741, Edwards chose for his topic: *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God, Applied to that Uncommon Operation That Has Lately Appeared on the Minds of Many of the People of this Land: With a Particular Consideration of the Extraordinary Circumstances with Which This Work is Attended*. Edwards first turned his attention to those who would discredit the revival on the basis of its epiphenomena.<sup>70</sup> He warned against doing “anything in the least to clog or hinder” the revival, but to a large degree his sermon polarized attitudes and within twelve months Charles Chauncy endeavoured to discredit the entire movement.<sup>71</sup> By the end of 1742, the situation had become sharply polarized. Edwards was inexpressibly saddened by the emergence of hostile parties called New Lights and Old Lights. The breach was irreparable. Armed with his quill pen he threw himself into the fray in one last effort to make peace and to search for solid ground between “pious zealots” and “diabolical opposers.” At the end of the year he sent to the printer a manuscript of *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New- England, And the Way in which it ought to be acknowledged and promoted, Humbly offered to the Publick, in a Treatise on that Subject*.<sup>72</sup>

### (c) *Impact of the Mature Sarah Edwards*

As in the days leading to his conversion, so now in this volatile period of revivals, Edwards was once again profoundly affected by Sarah and the undeniable integrity of her spiritual experiences. At the height of the Great Awakening in 1742, Sarah Edwards experienced a series of ecstatic episodes. In 1735 and in 1739 her experiences were strong, but in 1742 they reached an overpowering climax while Jonathan was away on a preaching tour to Leicester for two weeks. When he returned to Northampton, he was profoundly moved by Sarah’s experiences and asked her to write them down. Her first person narrative provides clear

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 126 -7.

<sup>70</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 53.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 55-6, 63. Before a foreign audience – the ultimate affront to Americans – he vilified the whole revival as “the effects of enthusiastic heat” with the anonymous publication in Scotland of *A Letter from a Gentleman in Boston, to Mr George Wishart, on of the Ministers of Edinburgh, Concerning the State of Religion in New England*.

<sup>72</sup> Thus began a critical but sympathetic examination of revivalism which he developed and refined until it issued in the mature statement of 1746, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 64-5, 290.



evidence of both her experiences and her formative influence on the Edwards persona. Indeed, her influence is so significant, and yet commonly so neglected, that it warrants some detailed attention here.

Sarah's testimony became the final case history Edwards set before the world to authenticate the revival. In this process, Edwards changed each personal pronoun to "the person" and carefully suppressed every indication of identity, even of gender,<sup>73</sup> probably to ensure that Sarah's testimony was not undermined by her gender or her relationship to him. Puritan theologians had explored the nature of the female soul and discovered within "a problematic personality, weak character, even inferior spiritual capacity, all the natural outgrowth of women's inferior biology." Ministers and magistrates had concluded that women were "not merely inferior but essentially evil or at least congenitally inclined toward evil." Women were burdened with a range of character flaws that could be summarized as "passionate and uncontrolled, incapable of reason, supremely credulous and thus, easily led astray."<sup>74</sup>

Edwards did not share their conclusions.<sup>75</sup> For him, the indelible impress of Sarah's experiential dynamism superseded society's traditions and inherited doctrinal orthodoxy as he formulated his newly synthesised concept of God's sovereignty and God's visible and accessible nature. Early in his career his efforts to personally embody spiritual virtue, godliness and true sainthood began with his future wife, as expressed in his "Apostrophe to Sarah Pierpont." In a 1735 letter to his Bostonian benefactor, Benjamin Colman, which was later to become his *Faithful Narrative* (1737), Edwards had provided an extended account of an unidentified "pious woman in the town ... a very modest bashful person," to whom God gave "more and more of a sense of his glory and love ... till her nature began to sink under it"... and she was found in "an unusual, extraordinary frame" that so alarmed the neighbors they were "afraid she would die."<sup>76</sup> This account bears an uncanny resemblance to Sarah Edwards's account of her spiritual experiences during the later 1742 revival.<sup>77</sup> When he,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>74</sup> Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600-1850. The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions*, 73.

<sup>75</sup> If he reckoned that the testimony evidenced God's sovereign activity in the individual's life, he used it. The morphology of conversion which emerges from the pages of *A Faithful Narrative* is what revivalists in and after the Great Awakening came to expect of all converts. Edwards climaxed his account with two individual case histories, those of Abigail Hutchinson, a young single woman starving to death, and Phebe Bartlett, a spiritually precocious girl aged four. Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 29-30.

<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "To the Reverend Benjamin Colman," in Claghorn, *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 54-5.

<sup>77</sup> Throughout his life, Edwards tried to realize in writing the abstract ideal of the saint by embodying it in a familiar persona, whether that of Sarah Pierpont Edwards in his early *Apostrophe* and later *Thoughts on the*

Jonathan, “went up to see her” in his house, he found her “perfectly sober and in the exercise of her reason, but having her nature seemingly overborne and sinking, and when she could speak expressing in a manner that can’t be described the sense she had of the glory of God, and particularly of such and such perfections ....” The affected person also had a sense of her own unworthiness and “longed to lie in the dust; sometimes her longing to go to be with Christ, and crying out of the excellency of Christ, and the wonderfulness of his dying love” continued for hours, “though not always in the same degree.” Some of the time she was able “to discourse to those about her,” but it seemed to Edwards that she would have “sunk and her frame dissolved under it” if God had manifested a little more of himself to her.<sup>78</sup>

Since this experience, Edwards later recounted, this pious lady “has since been at my house, and continues as full as she can hold, but looks on herself not as an eminent saint; but as the worst of all, and unworthy to go and speak with a minister; but yet now beyond any great doubt of her good estate.” The extensive account Edwards accords to this woman’s experience in his *Faithful Narrative*, along with her proximity to him “upstairs in his house,” indicates that it is none other than his Sarah who forgoes the customary sharing of an awakening experience with “a minister.” In the light of the opposition that followed, Edwards no doubt felt justified in hiding her identity, just as he would do in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742),<sup>79</sup> when he needed the ultimate experience to confound his “diabolical opposers,” and where he also used Sarah’s mature narrative as she once again emerged as “Jonathan’s paradigm of experimental piety.”<sup>80</sup> Accepting and defending the absolute validity of Sarah’s experiences, Edwards quickly pointed out that Sarah’s “transporting views and rapturous affections are not attended with any enthusiastic disposition to follow impulses, or any supposed prophetic revelations”<sup>81</sup>

Edwards’s “supreme example of heartfelt religion experienced as ecstatic transport and lived in sober righteousness” rightly belonged to his beloved Sarah.<sup>82</sup> He revealed her most

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Revival or of Phebe Bartlett in his *Faithful Narrative*, or of himself as projected on the canvas of his *Personal Narrative*.

Wilson H. Kimnach, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1743-1758*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 25 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>78</sup> Edwards, “To the Reverend Benjamin Colman,” 54-5.

<sup>79</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thought Concerning the Present State of Revival in Northampton,” in *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 289-515.

<sup>80</sup> Claghorn, *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 747.

<sup>81</sup> Edwards, “Some Thought Concerning the Present State of Revival in Northampton,” 335.

<sup>82</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 68.

intimate, intense experiences to those who opposed the movement and then allowed his own “pent up heart-cry to escape.”<sup>83</sup>

Now if such things are enthusiasm, and the fruits of a distempered brain, let my brain be evermore possessed of that happy distemper! If this be distraction, I pray God that the world of mankind may be all seized with this benign, meek, beneficent, beatifical, glorious distraction! If agitations of body were found in the French Prophets,<sup>84</sup> and ten thousand prophets more, ’tis little to their purpose, who bring it as an objection against such a work as this, unless their purpose be to disprove the whole of the Christian religion.<sup>85</sup>

Granting (but not condoning) “all the imprudence and disorders, passions and heats, transports and ecstasies, errors in judgment and indiscreet zeal,” Edwards insisted that there had been “an astonishing alteration in personal piety and social morality all over New England.”<sup>86</sup> In the face of what to him was luminously *en evidence*, “it was positively shameful that any should profess not to know whether this was the work of God or the work of the Devil.”<sup>87</sup> In his edited version of Sarah’s 1742 account, Edwards reported how from childhood experiences of communion with God,

The person came in the Northampton revivals to a very frequent dwelling, for some considerable time together, in such views of the glory of the divine perfections, and Christ’s excellencies, that [her] soul in the meantime has been as it were perfectly overwhelmed, and swallowed up with light and love ... continuing for five or six hours together, without any interruption, in that clear and lively view or sense of the infinite beauty and amiableness of Christ’s person and the sweetness of his excellent and transcendent love; so that the soul remained in a kind of heavenly Elysium swimming in the rays of Christ’s love ... The persons soul dwelt on high and was lost in God ... accompanied with extraordinary views of divine things, and religious affections.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>84</sup> The French prophets were a group of Huguenots from the mountains of Southern France who, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, were driven by fierce persecution into bizarre and sometimes fanatical behaviour. In the mind of the New England establishment, the French Prophets were the epitome of enthusiasm. Ibid., 63.

<sup>85</sup> Edwards, “Some Thought Concerning the Present State of Revival in Northampton,” 341.

<sup>86</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 68.

<sup>87</sup> Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Present State of Revival in Northampton,” 320.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 332.

Here was enough evidence to convince Edwards that Sarah's experiences were a work of God that every believer could experience and should experience. Added to this, the person recognized their "own exceeding littleness and vileness,"<sup>89</sup> another Edwards must for the elect redeemed. Two other things "felt by the person" at the time Edwards deemed worthy of special mention: "a peculiar sensible aversion to a judging others ... and a very great sense of the importance of moral social duties"<sup>90</sup> These were evidences of piety that authenticated a work of God for all, regardless of their pathway to conversion and progress. Puritan Christians were activists.

On page after page Edwards listed many of the elements of Sarah's extraordinary experiences. She had an "extraordinary sense of the awful majesty and greatness of God, so as oftentimes to take away the bodily strength." She had a sense of the holiness of God, "as of a flame infinitely pure and bright, so as sometimes to overwhelm the soul and body." She had a sense of the "piercing all-seeing eye of God ... together with an extraordinary view of the infinite wrath of God and the ineffable misery of sinners that are exposed to this wrath."<sup>91</sup> So too the person was convicted about "the certain truth of the great things revealed in the gospel and an overwhelming sense of the glory of the work of redemption and the way of salvation." The person had "a sense of the glorious, unsearchable, unerring wisdom of God in his works of creation and providence, so as to swallow up the soul and overcome the strength of the body." The person had "vehement longings and faintings after more love to Christ and great delight in singing praises to God,"<sup>92</sup> and a "vehement and constant desire for the setting up of Christ's Kingdom on earth." The person's soul was "often entertained with unspeakable delight and bodily strength overborne at the thoughts of heaven as a world of love, where love shall be the soul's eternal food and they shall dwell in the light of love and swim in an ocean of love."<sup>93</sup> The person experienced "the greatest, fullest, longest, continual and most constant assurance of the favour of God" that Edwards ever saw "any appearance of in any person," and "an uninterrupted entire resignation to God with respect to life or death, sickness or health, ease or pain."<sup>94</sup> The person was blessed with a "wonderful access to God by prayer, as it were seeing him, and sensibly immediately conversing with him as if Christ were here

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 339.

on earth, sitting on a visible throne, to be approached to and conversed with.”<sup>95</sup> All of this for Edwards added up to a work of God in the individual’s life; a work of God that he sought and valued, and a work of God that he hoped would sway his readers.

Edwards was very much taken by the fact that the person had

extraordinary views of divine things, and religious affections, being frequently attended with very great effects on the body, the strength of the body being taken away, so as to deprive of all ability to stand or speak ... great emotion and agitation ... causing the person to leap (wholly unavoidably) with joy and mighty exultation of soul – drawn toward God and Christ in heaven.<sup>96</sup>

He saw the cause of this “fainting with the love of Christ, ... great agitations of body, and an unavoidable leaping for joy ... and great rejoicing with trembling” as the person’s “extraordinary self-dedication, and renunciation of the world, and resignation of all to God.”<sup>97</sup> These were qualities he was himself pursuing and was in the process of perfecting.

(d) *Sarah’s Elysium*

Edwards drew his account from Sarah’s more relational and more readable narrative in which she recounted for him how the presence of God was so near, and so real that

I seemed scarcely conscious of anything else .... The whole world with all its enjoyments, and all its troubles, seemed to be nothing: My God was my all, my only portion .... I continued in a very sweet and lively sense of divine things, day and night, sleeping and waking, until Saturday, January 23.<sup>98</sup>

In her husband’s absence, another successful awakener, Mr Buell, visited Northampton and during his lectures, Sarah was “all at once filled with such intense admiration of the wonderful condescension and grace of God, in returning to Northampton, as overwhelmed my soul, and immediately took away my bodily strength.”<sup>99</sup> She further reported that, at a later gathering in her home, the intensity of her feelings again took away her bodily strength

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>98</sup> Mrs Sarah Edwards, “Her solemn self-dedications. – Her uncommon discoveries of the Divine Perfections and Glory; and the Excellencies in Christ. – Remarks concerning them,” in Sereno E. Dwight, ed., *The Works of President Edwards*, Vol.1 (New York: 1830), 171-4.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 174-5.

and “my mind was so deeply impressed with the love of Christ, and a sense of his immediate presence, that I could with difficulty refrain from rising from my seat and leaping for joy.”<sup>100</sup>

During Mr Buell’s reading of a hymn on June 28, Sarah’s soul was drawn so powerfully towards Christ and heaven that she leaped unconsciously from her chair.

I seemed to be drawn upwards, soul and body, from the earth towards heaven; and it appeared to me that I must naturally and necessarily ascend thither .... At length my strength failed me, and I sunk down; when they took me up and laid me on the bed, where I lay for a considerable time, faint with joy, while contemplating the glories of the heavenly world.<sup>101</sup>

Thursday night, January 28, 1742 was the sweetest night Sarah ever had in her life.

All night I continued in a constant, clear and lively sense of the heavenly sweetness of Christ’s excellent and transcendent love, of his nearness to me, and of my dearness to him. A glow of divine love came down from the heart of Christ in heaven, into my heart, in a constant stream, like a stream or pencil of sweet light. At the same time, my heart and soul flowed out in love to Christ; so that there seemed to be a constant flowing and reflowing of heavenly and divine love, from Christ’s heart to mine. My soul remained in a kind of heavenly elysium. The spiritual beauty of the Father and the Saviour seemed to engross my whole mind. The glory of God seemed to be all, and in all, and to swallow up every wish and desire of my heart.<sup>102</sup>

In the Edwards’s Elysium, God is and there is nothing else.

## V CONCLUSION

Edwards’s concept of the sovereignty of God was completely transformed from the terror-filled remoteness of Stoddard’s doctrine to conform to the serenely joyous embrace of his and Sarah’s experience. This concept was then taken up by Edwards as he continually sought to re-fashion himself in light of this new sense of God’s absolute sovereignty. It constituted the most important motif in his thought and writings.<sup>103</sup> It became the keystone of his theology. Over and over Edwards stressed the absolute importance of it. He drilled it into parishioners

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>103</sup> Avihu Zakai, “The Conversion of Jonathan Edwards,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 76, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 131.

as the primary necessity for their salvation in his sermon, “The Sole Consideration, That God is God, All Objections to His Sovereignty,”<sup>104</sup> and the sermon he preached at his Boston debut in 1731, “God Glorified in the Work of Redemption.”<sup>105</sup> Edwards loved to ascribe “Sovereignty” to God. His understanding of that sovereignty went through a transformation which in turn transformed him as a person and re-shaped the essence of his theology and philosophy. If there had been any contest in Jonathan Edwards’s mind prior to Sarah’s experiences about which morphology of conversion contained the true elements of the model saint, that contest was resolved by Sarah’s account. In this now more coherently formed conceptualization of the sovereignty of God, Edwards established the base line for the construction of his persona.

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<sup>104</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Divine Sovereignty,” in Dwight, *The Works of President Edwards*, Vol. VI (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 477-87.

<sup>105</sup> Stephen J. Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards. A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 71.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE EXTERNAL THREATENING OTHER

#### I INTRODUCTION

The sovereignty of God and Jonathan Edwards's own personal conversion experience which produced his new insights into that sovereignty gave Edwards a line in the sand from which he could never retreat. It provided, as it were, a genetic footprint as the base of what would become his fully developed persona. In taking this stand, he found himself immediately and constantly confronted with various conflicting forces which would assault or undermine his position and which he would feel compelled to resist.<sup>1</sup> According to Greenblatt, self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien and what is produced in this encounter partakes of both the authority and the alien.<sup>2</sup> The absolute authority or power to which Edwards had submitted is that of the Sovereignty of God. Self-fashioning then occurred as that concept confronted the hostility of rival forces, aliens such as the philosophical and religious factors which emanated from his context and which, as Edwards engaged them, were to prove determinative in the shaping of his public profile and the means by which he expressed it. This involved Edwards in a work of self-transformation. Work that he deemed necessary to perform on himself, "not in terms of the self uncovered but in terms of the self that was needed to be shaped for the world he envisaged."<sup>3</sup>

As the previous chapter detailed the emergence of the authority of the sovereignty of God as Edwards's starting point for all understanding, this chapter will investigate the external alien forces which helped shape Edwards's persona and the effect such conflicts had on determining the means by which he expressed himself. It will briefly describe the prevailing context, both the general philosophical and literary context and the more specific religio-political context, and then proceed to review how Edwards engaged the specific aliens in terms of both what he read and what he wrote as evidence of his emerging persona.

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<sup>1</sup> These forces are what Greenblatt refers to as "aliens" and the conflicts with such alien forces were to become significant environmental factors in the process of self-fashioning of Edwards's persona. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), x - xi.



## II CONTEXT AND CONFLICT

### (a) *The General Context: Philosophical and Literary*

The great watershed period in British and Continental thought began about 1675, when Nicholas Malebranche's *Search After Truth* was first published and when the Third Earl of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* appeared in full. This period of about thirty-five years included Locke and Newton and was a period of great fertility and interchange in ideas. Along with the discovery of the New World and the migration of thousands to it in the seventeenth-century, Western Christianity underwent a profound intellectual transformation through a prolonged series of critical self re-examinations of its basic intellectual foundations in many spheres. Enlightenment thinkers fostered trust in human autonomy, arguing for the authority of reason rather than the traditional authority of scripture. Much of the Enlightenment thought in the first half of the eighteenth century was a direct reaction to the conflicting absolutist claims of the preceding era of deadly religious wars. Edwards came of age at a time and place that would give him an acute sense of the juxtaposition of old and new outlooks in the revolution taking place in European/British culture.<sup>4</sup>

New England was well within the orbit of the cultural centres of Britain and the Continent in the eighteenth century, and shared many common borders with these countries in the realm of thought.<sup>5</sup> England, France and Holland constructed a remarkable well-integrated "Republic of Letters," published in Amsterdam by the "erudite Calvinist, Pierre Bayle."<sup>6</sup> New Englanders of the 1700s subscribed to British journals to keep in touch with the international Republic of Letters, promoted by this loose network of learned individuals who eschewed the dogmatism of the medieval and Reformation eras. New Englanders would also have known about Pierre Bayle's encyclopaedic and sometimes sceptical *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697-1702) soon after it was translated into English in 1710. They were familiar with the English "latitudinarians" and such Anglican writers as the popular preacher John Tillotson (1630-94), who used reason to disparage many Calvinist dogmas, and they would have quickly learned of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury's celebration of a sense of divine beauty, published in *The Moralists* in 1709. They spent time discussing the latest intelligence from the periodicals,

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<sup>4</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 13-15.

<sup>6</sup> Marc Fumaroli, "The Republic of Letters," *Diogenes* 143 (Fall 1988): 129.

such as Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's witty and sophisticated *The Spectator* which contained the latest in contemporary thought.<sup>7</sup>

During this same time period another kind of English periodical publication was also serving a few "men of letters" in America. Although not nearly so popular as the genteel periodical, the eighteenth-century "learned journal" was a useful instrument of cosmopolitan intellectual life. The innovation of these "learned" journals was an important ramification of the entire systematization of bibliographical culture which was forced on the western world by the development of modern printing. As more books were published in more localities it became increasingly necessary that their appearance be publicly noticed and made known as widely as possible by media, other than had written correspondence.<sup>8</sup> A handful of serious readers in eighteenth-century America were utterly dependent on these little known publications for deliverance from isolation and provincialism. The emergence of these learned journals provided them with a forum for discussion, a place where ideas could be submitted to the judgment of the reading public without the inevitable prejudice recognized to be present in personal encounters.<sup>9</sup> Cotton Mather, Samuel Johnson, Jonathan Edwards and James Logan learnt about new books published, new ideas advanced and the state of the argument on any given issue from these learned journals.<sup>10</sup> At the time, institutions that transmitted these ideas did not exist in America so the only way colonial American intellectuals could keep alive their philosophical interests was through the reporting in periodical literature.<sup>11</sup> This was the general learned culture with which Edwards engaged.

(b) *The Specific Context: Religio-Political*

One of the paradoxes of early American colonial history was the extreme intolerance of many of those, particularly the settlers of New England, who had fled to the New World to escape persecution. Those who sought religious freedom for themselves all too often did not

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<sup>7</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 62.

<sup>8</sup> Another goal of these learned journals was that of holding together a rapidly expanding intellectual community that no longer could rely so easily on personal acquaintance for news and recent happenings. Norman Fiering, "Notes and Documents: The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: A Note on the Circulation of Learned Periodicals to Early Eighteenth-Century America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 33, no. 4 (October 1976): 646.

<sup>9</sup> Harcourt Brown, "History and the Learned Journal," *Journal of the History of Ideas* xxxiii (1972): 377.

<sup>10</sup> Fiering, "Notes and Documents: The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: A Note on the Circulation of Learned Periodicals to Early Eighteenth-Century America," 643.

<sup>11</sup> English learned periodicals began as imitations or rivals of publications originating on the Continent after the mid-seventeenth century. The father of them all, it is generally acknowledged, was the French *Journal des Scavans* begun in January of 1665. Ibid., 643-4.

perceive that others of unlike beliefs were also entitled to that same liberty.<sup>12</sup> Thousands migrated to the New World in order to worship God in their own way. Roman Catholics, Quakers, Huguenots, Moravians, Mennonites, and various others participated in the settlement of America. Each group was primarily interested in escaping from a land, be it England, France, or Germany, in which they could not practise their religious tenets because of opposition or actual persecution.<sup>13</sup>

For over a thousand years prior to European settlement of America, the Old World had developed the concept of a close union of church and state which had become axiomatic. The church was the mentor of the state and the state the protector of the church. The civil authorities legislated for the benefit of a system of church beliefs and established a particular church as the advocate of the only legally approved set of religious tenets. Religious uniformity was regarded as essential to national unity.<sup>14</sup> The issue was profoundly political, not simply a matter of religious preference. New England's identity was built around an established church that was Congregational or Presbyterian. New England's churches were not just tolerated "dissenters" as Congregationalists and Presbyterians were in England, they were the State church.

Edwards lived at the vortex of three conflicting civilizations: the British Protestant, the French Catholic and the Native American. With regard to the first two, imperialism and religion were integrally connected.<sup>15</sup> The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to Foreign Parts (SPG) was incorporated in 1701 to care for the Anglican religious needs of English colonists and to make "other provisions" for spreading the gospel to English territories.<sup>16</sup> During the seventeenth century the legal establishment of Anglicanism was instituted in some of the North American colonies. The eighteenth century witnessed a reinvigorated Anglicanism in the colonies through the SPG and just over 300 clergy founded over 300 churches between 1701 and 1783. This colonial mission was successful enough in

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<sup>12</sup> Robert T. Miller, "Religious Conscience in Colonial New England," *Journal of Church and State* 50, no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 665.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 662.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 661-2.

<sup>15</sup> English settlement in North America had begun with the founding of Jamestown in Virginia in 1607, although the later establishment of the Plymouth colony by English Protestant Separatists from Holland in 1620 became more famous. This latter group were Puritan English, dissenting from the Church of England, who believed God had revealed America at just the right time for them to escape a religiously corrupt Europe. Rowan Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire c.1700-1850* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42.

<sup>16</sup> H. P. Thompson, *Into All Lands: the History of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in foreign Parts, 1701-1950* (London: SPCK, 1951), 2.

targeting prominent Congregationalist ministers including the head of Yale College in 1718.<sup>17</sup> Anglicanism had been technically legal for decades in Connecticut, but no Anglican priest had successfully established a mission in the colony. Cosmopolitan Boston had learned to live with an Anglican presence, but every Connecticut town had resisted this Puritan nemesis.<sup>18</sup> If Anglicans became strong in New England, it was not hard to imagine the day when colonies would be brought into conformity with the mother country, with an Anglican Episcopal establishment.<sup>19</sup> That Edwards and others held a dim view of the Church of England was evident in his 1738 letter to Benjamin Colman, in which he complained about the “injurious, oppressive designs of the Church of England against us, which helped to thicken and darken the cloud that hangs over the land.”<sup>20</sup>

Anglicanism also meant (albeit tangentially) opening the floodgates to “Arminianism,” which had become a catch-all term for most challenges to strict Calvinist teachings. Among the enemies of orthodoxy, none had more notoriety than “Calvinism’s subtly subversive offspring, Arminianism.” The term derives from Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch theologian who originally advocated Calvinism but began to question the Calvinist view of predestination and the atonement. His followers expressed their views in *The Remonstrance* (1610), which emphasized human response and free will in salvation. From the beginning of New World settlements, New Englanders had defined themselves against Anglicanism, Arminianism, and moral laxity.<sup>21</sup> Some prominent clergy, such as Boston’s Charles Chauncey and Harvard President John Leverett, advocated Arminian principles and influenced the Congregational churches of New England. At Harvard College in 1721, a weekly periodical entitled *The Telltale* was inaugurated by a group of students including Ebenezer Pemberton (the younger), Charles Chauncy and Isaac Greenwood. As *The Telltale* subtitle, “Criticisms on the Conversation and Behaviour of Scholars to Promote right reasoning and good manners,” made explicit, it was a direct imitation of the English genteel

<sup>17</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire c.1700-1850*, 43.

<sup>18</sup> Strenuous efforts by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (the missionary wing of the Church of England) to plant churches in Connecticut found only stony soil. People still living remembered Puritans in England who had suffered grievously for their faith when Charles II and Anglicanism were re-established in 1660. For most Connecticut people, recounting such awful events still helped define who they were. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 83-4.

<sup>19</sup> The current royal governor of Massachusetts, Samuel Shute, although from an English dissenter family, had recently come out of the closet as an Anglican. Some even accused high church Anglicans of being sympathetic to the Jacobite effort, most recently attempted in 1715, of placing the Roman Catholic Stuart “Pretender” back on the British throne. *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Benjamin Coleman, May 27, 1738,” in George S. Claghorn, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 16 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 77-9.

<sup>21</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 138

periodical, *The Tattler*.<sup>22</sup> On the other side of the Atlantic, Thomas Chubb, Daniel Whitby and the hymn writer Isaac Watts furthered the Arminian cause.<sup>23</sup> This was to become a major alien for Edwards to confront.

That Edwards held an equally dim view of Roman Catholicism is also obvious. He saw the Church of Rome as the Antichrist that would be defeated in the last epoch of human history before the millennium.<sup>24</sup> The Roman church, Edwards said, is worse than Islam or Judaism; it is like a “viper or some loathsome, poisonous, crawling monster.”<sup>25</sup> In general, eighteenth-century New Englanders believed their liberty and their destiny as a people depended on the triumph of the Protestant cause. However, as the French population was small, the 15,000 French Catholic residents of New France would have been little threat to the far more numerous New Englanders, except for their Indian allies. While Roman Catholicism was thus a part of the alien religio-political context, the main part of the inter-denominational battles had been fought in the previous century and, while Edwards maintained the received angst against Catholicism, it was not generally one of his targeted foes.

### III EDWARDS’S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ALIENS

#### (a) *Philosophical Context: Reading and Responding*

Edwards immersed himself in the literature of the emerging British and Continental Enlightenment.<sup>26</sup> His conversion experience dictated a program of work that required, in part, an interpretation of the world around him in harmony with his profound new insights based on God’s absolute sovereignty, personal inability, a new sense of the heart (will) and the idea of being swallowed up by the beauty, excellency and holiness of God. In the light of this invasion of the colony of New England by the new ideas of the Enlightenment that rejected the major tenets of his worldview and orthodox Calvinism, Edwards intentionally set about combating what he regarded as heresy. He became a ravenous reader. He read

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<sup>22</sup> Fiering, “Notes and Documents: The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: A Note on the Circulation of Learned Periodicals to Early Eighteenth-Century America,” 642.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards. A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 2001), 175-6.

<sup>24</sup> One conventional Protestant interpretation of prophecies concerning the “beast” in Daniel and the Apocalypse, was that Antichrist or the papacy would be defeated 1260 years after the ascendancy of the Papacy in 606 A.D., so that meant the decisive blow against papal power was likely to occur around 1866. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 88-9.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany hh,” in Thomas A. Schafer, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 13 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984), 185-6.

<sup>26</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 7.

“constantly and omnivorously.”<sup>27</sup> During his time at Yale (1716-22), first as an undergraduate, then as a Masters student, he engaged all the contemporary issues in theology and philosophy, including orthodox Calvinism, Deism, Arminianism, British empiricism and Continental rationalism. His extensive personal reading was promoted at Yale which was a school of rather provincial resources until Jeremiah Dummer, London agent for the Massachusetts and Connecticut Colonies, gave the college more than 800 books covering every major branch of learning.<sup>28</sup> This library became accessible to Edwards in his senior year, by which time the college had been consolidated in New Haven. He had further opportunity to use the new library during his years as a tutor (1724-26).<sup>29</sup>

Edwards’s “Catalogue,” a forty-five page notebook containing some 720 entries and spanning his entire career, is a list of books he read or hoped to read. We would know very little about his reading but for this document. The Catalogue is not a list of books that Edwards had collected. He had a habit of jotting down books which he thought might be of interest.<sup>30</sup> Reference notes in his treatises, miscellanies and letters also suggest that his reading was extensive. Edwards became familiar with a host of writers: Thomas Hobbes, Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, William Wollaston, Isaac Newton, Ralph Cudworth, Hugo Grotius, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Lord Kames, John Tillotson, Joseph Butler, Matthew Tindal, John Toland, Thomas Chubb, David Hume and Lord Bolingbroke.<sup>31</sup>

The Catalogue of reading between 1732 and 1740 has many references to the *New Memoirs of Literature* and to the *Republic of Letters*. It reveals that he not only knew *The Spectator* before 1720 but he was so enamoured of Richard Steele that he tried to get his hands on everything that issued from the essayist’s pen: *The Guardian*, *The Englishman*, *The Reader* and more.<sup>32</sup> There is abundant evidence of his interest in the new “polite” culture of reading,

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas H. Johnson, “Jonathan Edwards’s Background of Reading,” *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, Vol. 28 (1931): 194.

<sup>28</sup> The danger of the Dummer books was made starkly apparent in 1722 when Yale rector Timothy Cutler, tutor Samuel Johnson and five local ministers declared their Congregational ordinations invalid and announced their intention to seek Episcopal reordination. This defection to Anglicanism opposed the whole history of the Puritan revolution. The main reason given for their defection was the influence of the Dummer collection, with its substantial number of Arminian, latitudinarian, and other heretical titles. Peter J. Thuesen, “Edwards’s Intellectual Background,” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>30</sup> See Thomas H. Johnson, “Jonathan Edwards’s Background of Reading,” 204-209 for a detailed list of Edwards’s books.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-222.

<sup>32</sup> Fiering, “Notes and Documents: The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: A Note on the Circulation of Learned Periodicals to Early Eighteenth-Century America,” 642.

such as Steele and Addison's *Guardian*, Steele's *Ladies Library* (a compendium of polite literature by various authors) and the *London Magazine*, which reported extensively on the polite European world of print. The last page of every issue of the *London Magazine* included a "Catalogue" of new books. Edwards cited these book notices in his own Catalogue at least sixteen times and referred with equal frequency to book listings in the *Republic of Letters*.<sup>33</sup> His notes on books which he wanted to read or intended to buy sometimes ended with such phrases as "exceedingly commended in the Republic of Letters, Vol. 17" or "of which the Republic of Letters gives a very agreeable Idea vol.18" and "see an account of it Repub. Of Lett., vol.12." Often there were long quotations from journals in his Catalogue. Amy Plantinga Pauw has suggested that Edwards's tendency to copy long extracts reveals him in an intellectually vital "acquisitive mode, industriously gathering food for theological consumption." His appetite for knowledge led him to stay abreast of the latest developments in many fields of enquiry.<sup>34</sup> He read all books from which he could hope to get any help in his pursuit of knowledge.

Another manuscript, his "Account Book," contains reference to over a hundred different books he lent to friends and parishioners.<sup>35</sup> Of the approximately seventy-seven strictly theological works mentioned in his "Account Book," two in seven are "polite" (Anglican, latitudinarian, or Enlightenment) volumes, while the rest may be classified broadly as Nonconformist or Reformed. Books standing in the Puritan lineage predominate, though the smaller number of "polite" titles in his purely theological reading must be seen alongside his frequent use of more wide-ranging works such as Steele's *Ladies Library* and *Guardian*. He also frequently lent out Daniel Defoe's *Family Instructor* (1715) and *Religious Courtship* (1722), as well as Samuel Richardson's popular novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748). Edwards and his colleagues also circulated the latitudinarian writings of Archbishop Tillotson, who was among the anonymous authors of the *Ladies Library*. To be sure, the reading of such figures need not imply endorsement; indeed Edwards himself, when engaging in theological debate, often turned to the likes of Tillotson or Clarke for statements of "the other side of the question," as he put it in 1738 in *Discourses on Various Important Subjects*.

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<sup>33</sup> On Edwards's interest in these and similar publications, see Fiering's article, "The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: A Note on the Circulation of Learned Periodicals in the Early Eighteenth-Century America," 642-60.

<sup>34</sup> Thuesen, "Edwards's Intellectual Background," 30.

<sup>35</sup> Book transactions between Edwards and other clergy are also recorded in the minutes of the ministerial association of Hampshire County, Massachusetts, which convened twice a year during Edwards's pastorate of the First Congregational Church in Northampton. Taken together, these sources reveal a detailed picture of Edwards's bibliographic universe.

Edwards's response to the competing forces at play in his colonial scene was to engage them in battle through his many writings. To acquire the knowledge that filled his many literary efforts he immersed himself in God, scripture and nature.<sup>36</sup> He quickly adopted the act of writing as the means by which he defended his worldview against what he perceived as pernicious heresies. These hostile forces included the secular moral philosophy and ethics, mechanical philosophy and new narratives of history of the Enlightenment, as well as the more specifically religious elements of Deism, Arminianism, French Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism. Through his prolific writings, Edwards waged constant combat with these British and Continental forces which were invading the colony. His commitment to this venture against these alien forces moulded him. Indeed, their very literary nature was determinative of the genre Edwards would adopt in his counter-attack, namely, philosophical writing to defend the sovereignty of God experienced in his personal conversion.

Edwards's aim was to write books that aroused comment in London.<sup>37</sup> During his Yale tutorship he reminded himself in a memorandum about writing style. He noted favourably the genre of philosophical dialogue employed by the Third Earl of Shaftesbury and because he was contemplating how he would do battle with Shaftesbury and others of the same ilk, he reminded himself: "Before I venture to publish in London, to make some experiment in my own country, to play at small games first, that I may gain some experience in writing."<sup>38</sup> His *Miscellanies* comprise 1500 mini-essays on all manner of theological and philosophical subjects. Thanks to the heroic labour of Thomas Schafer on these private theological and philosophical journals, we can now peer into what we might term Edwards's writing workshop.<sup>39</sup> His controversial treatises were written to destroy the arguments of his opponents:

In all intellectual disputes Edwards beat down his opponents, demolishing even the slightest contradictions. He had to prove himself right in every detail. Even in his non-combative writings, his arguments were exhaustive. What often appears as repetition was part of a massive effort to block every conceivable loophole.

The careful definitions, the close reasoning, the piling up of proofs and

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<sup>36</sup> W. Clark Gilpin, "The Theology of Solitude: Edwards, Emerson, Dickinson," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* Issue 1, no. 1 (2001): 31-42.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Natural Philosophy Cover-Leaf Memoranda," in Wallace E. Anderson, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 6 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1980), 194.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>39</sup> Philip F. Gura, "Jonathan Edwards in American Literature," *Early American Literature*, 39, no. 1 (2004): 147-66.



illustrations were the natural ways of his thorough and fastidious mind. The truth had to be expressed immaculately and in perfect order, leaving no gaps for error to invade.<sup>40</sup>

As a writer, Edwards was self-conscious about language. In text after text throughout his career, he struggled with the relation of words to the ideas they represent and sought verbal precision that effectively tied his opponents in knots. In his treatise on *Religious Affections*, when he sought to draw the distinction between the “affections” and “passions,” he stated, “It must be confessed that language is here somewhat imperfect, and the meaning of words is in a considerable measure loose and unfixed, and not precisely limited by custom, which governs the use of language.” Similarly, in his notes on “The Mind,” Edwards complained, “We are used to apply the same words a hundred different ways so that ideas being so much tied and associated with the words, they lead us into a thousand real mistakes.”<sup>41</sup> The Yale edition of Edwards’s writings, available both in print and electronically, provides a sense of how much he wrote and with what high degree of sophistication. To date, twenty-seven volumes are available with another forty-five volumes planned.<sup>42</sup> Three of his many works – *Religious Affections*, *Freedom of the Will* and *The Nature of True Virtue* – stand as masterpieces in the larger history of Christian literature. His biography of David Brainerd was a best-selling religious text in nineteenth-century America.<sup>43</sup> Edwards spent enormous amounts of time in his study, day and night, year after year, writing thousands upon thousands of pages with a quill pen. He industriously gathered his knowledge from disparate sources in his fight against what he regarded as the “many bold attempts made against Christ, and the religion he taught.”<sup>44</sup>

Edwards, then, is primarily known to us through his writings. We understand his worldview and his character from the way he wrote about himself in his autobiographical writings, personal letters and private journals.<sup>45</sup> Samuel Hopkins, Edwards’s first biographer, recorded

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<sup>40</sup> Richard L. Bushman, “Jonathan Edwards as a Great Man: Identity, Conversion, and Leadership in the Great Awakening,” in William J. Scheick, ed., *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards*, (Boston, Massachusetts: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980), 45.

<sup>41</sup> Gura, “Jonathan Edwards in American Literature,” 147-166.

<sup>42</sup> See *The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University* (electronic resource). ATLA Religion Database, EBSCO host (2006).

<sup>43</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend Thomas Foxcroft,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 695.

<sup>45</sup> Edwards employed the three literary forms of autobiographical narrative, journal and letter as spiritual disciplines. As forms they constitute the “life problem” that their “content” seeks to describe and ponder and

that Edwards rose at “four or five in the morning and commonly spent thirteen hours every day in his study.” In addition to the retreat of his study he “would ride two or three miles after dinner to some lonely grove, where he would dismount and walk a while.” At these times he generally “carried his pen and ink with him to note any thought that should be suggested, which he chose to retain or pursue.”<sup>46</sup> If the weather was too inclement for writing, he pinned coloured papers to his coat when out riding as reminders of his thoughts so that none would be lost. All of his ideas and thoughts that had entered his mind were written down and carefully preserved in notebooks upon returning home. This pattern of resource gathering had become habitual early in Edwards’s life.<sup>47</sup> He believed his talent was writing.

In a letter to the “Trustees of the College of New Jersey” in 1757, in response to the invitation to become President of the College at Princeton, Edwards revealed his approach to study and writing.

My method of study, from my first beginning the work of the ministry, has been very much by writing; applying myself in this way, to improve every important hint; pursuing the clue to my utmost, when anything in reading, meditation or conversation, has been suggested to my mind, that seemed to promise light in any weighty point. Thus penning what appeared to me my best thoughts, on innumerable subjects for my own benefit. The longer I prosecuted my studies in this method, the more habitual it became, and the more pleasant and profitable I found it. The further I travelled in this way, the more and wider the field opened, which has occasioned my laying out many things, in my mind, to do in this manner, if God should spare my life, which my heart hath been made upon; particularly many things against most of the prevailing errors of the present day.<sup>48</sup>

The private literary writings that emerged out of these practices formed the basis for his more public genres, his sermon and treatises. In his habit of separating himself from others, immersing himself in God, scripture and nature, and spending innumerable hours writing up

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each of the three literary forms expresses a “mode of permanence” that is consistent with a conception of the ultimate environment. Gilpin, “The Theology of Solitude: Edwards, Emerson, Dickinson,” 41.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College of New Jersey* (Boston: Kneeland, 1765), 22-40. Cited in Gilpin, “The Theology of Solitude: Edwards, Emerson, Dickinson,” 33-4 n5.

<sup>47</sup> Gilpin, “The Theology of Solitude: Edwards, Emerson, Dickinson,” 33-4.

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Letter to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, Stockbridge, October 19, 1757,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 726-7.

his findings, Edwards created the particular ideal of the religious intellectual that he set out to become and which he sought to imbue in the minds of his peers, parishioners and family. Edwards took upon himself the task of becoming the *litterateur* who would refute “the prevailing errors of the present day (which tended to) the utter subverting of the gospel of Christ.”<sup>49</sup>

(b) *Mechanical Philosophy & Deism*

Deism was the religion of the English Enlightenment and as such it represented an amalgam of two alien forces: mechanical philosophy and (aberrant) religion. The discovery of new lands in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries played a significant role in the rise of Deism. John Tindal and Matthew Toland focused on the problem of particularity, which in their case meant the realization that only one-sixth of the world had heard the gospel, and that according to Calvinism the other five-sixths were damned. This threatened traditional notions of God’s goodness and justice and led deists to reshape God and religion in ways that undermined both Catholic and Protestant understandings of revelation.<sup>50</sup> Deism took the Enlightenment presupposition of intellectual autonomy most seriously. It comprised a surprisingly diverse collection of English thinkers, the most prominent of whom were John Toland (1670-1722), Matthew Tindal (1657-1733), Charles Blount (1654-1693), Thomas Chubb (1679-1746), Lord Bolingbroke (1678-1751) and Anthony Collins (1676-1729), who generally agreed that reason was all the revelation God gave to humanity.<sup>51</sup> Deists also denied the traditional Christian view of human corruption as well as the belief that human beings’ reason is so corrupted by sin that special revelation is necessary for the conduct of normal life.<sup>52</sup>

The mechanization of the natural world was an important feature of late seventeenth-century science. Some of the best thinkers accepted the world of Newton’s mechanics and of a God who worked through secondary causes. Newton’s God is a cosmic legislator, “a Universal Ruler,”<sup>53</sup> who is “an agent acting constantly according to certain laws.”<sup>54</sup> Mechanical

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 727.

<sup>50</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>51</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards, Deism, and the Mystery of Revelation,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 77, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 223n.

<sup>52</sup> Avihu Zakai, “The Age of Enlightenment,” in Stephen J. Stein, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, (Cambridge Collections Online: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 82 (accessed August 11, 2009). DOI:10.1017/CCOLO521852900.005.

<sup>53</sup> Sir Isaac Newton, “General Scholium,” in Florian Cajori, ed., *Sir Isaac Newton’s Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy and his System of the World*, Vol. 2, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1934), 544.

philosophers conceived of the world as a huge machine running like the work of a clock according to abstract mechanical laws of nature. Once set in motion by God, the course of nature and the phenomena of the world are the product of mere mechanical laws and no longer manifest the divine immanence. “The phenomena of the world,” wrote Boyle, “are physically produced by the mechanical affections of the part of matter, and what they operate upon one another according to mechanical laws.”<sup>55</sup> With the mechanization of the natural world, the notion of God’s relationship to it changed dramatically and God’s personal interventions could easily seem superfluous. “The Sovereign Redeemer of Luther and Calvin became (in scientific thought) the sovereign ruler of the world machine.”<sup>56</sup> Such a concept stood in stark opposition to Edwards’s conversion-born understanding of an active and personally engaging God.

Edwards was very aware of the advance of deism in England during the first three decades of the eighteenth century and anticipated its arrival in the colony.<sup>57</sup> He became familiar with most of the major writers, including Herbert of Cherbury, Charles Blount, Matthew Tindal, John Toland, Thomas Woolston, Anthony Collins and Thomas Morgan.<sup>58</sup> He used the same sixteenth and seventeenth-century discoveries to subvert deist claims for the universality of natural religion.<sup>59</sup> Why, in this age of discovery of new parts of the world, he asked, has no nation been found with knowledge of this natural religion? A good example of this line of questioning appeared in three sermons he gave in February 1740, titled “Man’s Natural Blindness in the Things of Religion”:

If human reason is really sufficient, and there be no need of anything else, why has it never proved so? Why has it never happened that so much as one nation, or

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<sup>54</sup> Sir Isaac Newton, “Four Letters to Richard Bentley, Letter iii, February 25, 1693,” in H. S. Thayer, ed., *Newton’s Philosophy of Nature: Selections from His Writings*, (New York: Hafner Press, 1974), 54.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Boyle, “About the Excellency And Grounds of the Mechanical Hypothesis (1674),” in M. A. Stewart, ed., *Selected Philosophical Papers of Robert Boyle*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 1991), 139.

<sup>56</sup> Gary B. Deason, “Reformation Theology and the Mechanistic Conception of Nature,” in D. C. Lindberg and R. L. Numbers, eds., *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 187.

<sup>57</sup> Amy Plantinga Pauw, “Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths,” *Church History* 70, no. 3 (September 2001), 580.

<sup>58</sup> Many of these he encountered second hand through compilations such as Philip Skelton’s *Deism Revealed* (1748), a text he copied from at considerable length in “Miscellanies No. 1350.” Edwards also used John Leland’s *View of the Principal Deistical Writers* (1754) and recommended to Joseph Bellamy the two-volumed response to Tindal published by Leland in 1733. Thuesen, “Edwards’s Intellectual Background,” 27-8.

<sup>59</sup> Edwards insisted that human beings before the advent of Christ and outside the borders of Christian nations were not and are not deprived of revelation, as deists claimed, but have been fairly inundated with the voice of God calling to them from many different directions. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths*, 43.

one city or town, or one assembly of men, have been brought to tolerable notions of divine things unless it is to be by the revelation contained in the Scriptures?<sup>60</sup>

According to Edwards, “all the people of these new lands had the same natural reason that the deists have, yet they do not have true notions of the divine being and his perfections by virtue of that human reason they have been possessed of so many thousands of years.”<sup>61</sup>

Edwards viewed Deism as an attack on God. It served as both background irritant and open antagonist for Edwards, who attacked Chubb and Tindal because he considered deism a dangerous force which had to be overcome. To the deist challenge that revelation has nothing to add to natural religion and organized worship is unimportant, Edwards responded that without revelation there is nothing to direct even deists how to worship. Revelation is absolutely necessary for “right social worship.”<sup>62</sup> The other part of true religion that would be necessary to find in history was what he called the “religion of a sinner.” This consists in the duties of “depraved guilty and offending creatures.” The light of nature, he argued, “has no tendency to reveal this to anyone; it never has because there is no possibility of it now that reason has been tainted by sinful corruption.” Even if the law of nature were known, “it still would be insufficient to establish the religion of a sinner or provide any grounding for it.”<sup>63</sup>

Typically, Edwards’s counter-attack on this alien concept was grounded on his personal conversion experience, but it had to be expressed in terms of the relevant cultural milieu. His conversion experience required an interpretation of the world around him in harmony with his convictions about God’s absolute sovereignty, personal inability, a new sense of the heart (will) and the idea of being swallowed up by the beauty, excellency and holiness of God. Edwards saw the material universe as an outgrowth of the divine life. “The beauties of nature are really emanations or shadows of the excellencies of the eternal Son of God.”<sup>64</sup> For Edwards, creation was not something that happened just long ago, it was also ongoing. “The universe is created out of nothing every moment,” he said, “and if it were not for our imaginations, which hinder us, we might see what wonderful work is performed

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<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Man’s Natural Blindness in the Things of Religion,” in Edward Hickman, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 253.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany No. 127,” in *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”*, (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500), 291.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany No. 1337,” in Douglas A. Sweeney, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 1153-1360), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 23 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004), 342-5.

<sup>64</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Images of Divine Things, No. 95,” in Wallace E. Anderson, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Typological Writings*, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 11 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 88.

continually.”<sup>65</sup> For Edwards, creation exists by virtue of a disposition in God to a fullness of life that spills over *ad extra*, beginning in the work of creation – not *ex nihilo*, but out of the fullness of God’s own being, enlarged and communicated outward like streams from a fountain.

This flowing forth is a process of continuous creation, every moment and everything existing only by virtue of the immediate communication of God’s presence, and not by virtue of any preceding cause or condition that is, not by virtue of something communicated from God, but something communicated of God.<sup>66</sup>

While deists silenced God, Edwards proclaimed that God was forever communicating, and through many diverse media – not only Scripture but also through nature and history.<sup>67</sup> His convictions about “continuous creation” and God’s role in it led him to reject the mechanistic conception of the world of nature as a self-contained and independent reality, a self-inclusive machine running by itself according to abstract universal laws of nature. He was alarmed by the new scientific interpretation which was increasingly distancing God from the world.<sup>68</sup> He launched his criticism of the metaphysical and theological premises of the mechanical philosophy of nature with a discussion of atoms, “the smallest physical particle in the universe.”<sup>69</sup> He appropriated the prevailing atomic doctrine but radically Christianized it in his desire to show how closely and intimately God’s divine activity controls and directs even the smallest particles of atoms in the physical world.<sup>70</sup>

Edwards’s first explicit reference to deism in the *Miscellanies* appears when he was only twenty-one or twenty-two years old, *Miscellany* 127. More than twenty-five percent of his private notebook entries (357 of 1412) are devoted explicitly to challenges raised by the deist

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<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Things to be Considered and Written fully About,” in Wallace E. Anderson, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 6 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1980), 241-2.

<sup>66</sup> Roland A Delattre, “Religious Ethics Today: Jonathan Edwards, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Beyond,” in Sang Hyun Lee and Allen C. Guelzo, eds., *Edwards in Our Time. Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Culture*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 72.

<sup>67</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths*, 43.

<sup>68</sup> Arminianism had “spread greatly in New England as well as Old,” and Deism had “overrun” England and was growing. It “prevails more and more.” Jonathan Edwards, “History of the Work of Redemption,” in John F. Wilson, ed., *Jonathan Edwards A History of the Work of Redemption*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 9 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989), 432.

<sup>69</sup> Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 96.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

agenda.<sup>71</sup> Thirteen are titled “Deism,” and he attacked their claims directly, usually employing extracts from Skelton’s *Deism Revealed* or Leland’s *View of the Principal Deistical Writers*.<sup>72</sup> Approximately a hundred *Miscellanies* titled “Christian Religion” defend the necessity of revelation or the integrity of the Bible. Miscellany 1170 defends the necessity of revelation.

The slow progress the world makes in the investigation of truth in things that seem pretty obvious, as in that instance of the roundness of the earth, may evince the necessity of a revelation to guide men into the knowledge of truth in divine things, that are needful to be known in order to our being happy in the knowledge and favour and enjoyment of God.<sup>73</sup>

In 1728-1729, Edwards addressed the deist challenge in a “Christian Religion” entry that outlined the themes he would use for the rest of his career to attack deism, he argued that without revelation much that seems clear in natural religion would be shrouded by darkness, doubt, and endless dispute.<sup>74</sup> Many of Edwards’s treatises were targeted at problems raised directly or indirectly by deists.<sup>75</sup>

The basic premise of Toland, Tindal and Chubb was that reason is a higher ruler than revelation: “One must doubt revelation because it does not agree with reason.” This was a tenet most deists agreed upon. Edwards’s attacks on their project fanned out in three lines: the first accused “freethinkers” of misunderstanding and misusing the word “reason”; the second charged Matthew Tindal with overstating the perfection of the law of nature; and the third chided Tindal for failure to appreciate mystery.<sup>76</sup> Edwards opened his argument with the claim that “freethinkers of late Ages” deceive themselves by “ambiguity or Equivocal use of

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<sup>71</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths*, 39.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>73</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany 1170,” in *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies” (Entry Nos. 1153-1360)*, 88.

<sup>74</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths*, 40.

<sup>75</sup> In the “History of the Work of Redemption,” Edwards noted, “The deists wholly cast off the Christian religion, and are professed infidels. They ben’t like the heretics, Arians and Socians, and others, that own the scriptures to be the word of God, and hold the Christian religion to be the true religion, but only deny these and these fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion; they deny the whole Christian religion. Indeed, they own the being of God but deny that Christ was the son of God; and say he was a mere cheat; and so they say all the prophets and apostles were. And they deny the whole Scripture; they deny that any of it is the word of God. They deny any revealed religion, or any word of God at all, and say that God has given mankind no other light to walk but his own reason.” Jonathan Edwards, “History of the Work of Redemption,” 432.

<sup>76</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards, Deism, and the Mystery of Revelation,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 77, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 214.

the word Reason.”<sup>77</sup> Edwards viewed revelation as a kind of evidence. So, when deists said that reason is superior to revelation, or all other testimony is superior to divine testimony, he claimed it was confusing. This meant that divine testimony is the very least and weakest of all arguments. But this contradicts their claims that God’s testimony, which they find in nature and reason, is the strongest testimony of all.<sup>78</sup> It was in such literary responses to the forces of deism that Edwards’s public persona - as a man of reason who used reason to overcome its own pretensions - was more fully established.

(c) *Arminianism*

Arminianism referred both to the specific teachings attributed to Arminius and to broader trends to affirm the ability of humans to contribute to their own salvation. The emphasis during the age of Enlightenment on human beings as fundamentally rational and morally and benevolently inclined was seen as endangering the traditional Christian doctrine of original sin.<sup>79</sup> During the eighteenth century, the controversy over human depravity signified an important struggle about the nature of human beings and their potentialities. The crucial point which divided Calvinists and Arminians was the freedom of the will. Arminians argued that God justified sinners, at least in part, on the basis of their sincere repentance and reformation.

Edwards saw Arminianism as a huge threat to the colony. He read widely on the Arminian controversy and wrote extensively on it and issues connected to it. He was not willing to “dismiss it, till I know the utmost of their matters.”<sup>80</sup> In a letter to John Erskine dated August 3, 1757, Edwards offered perhaps his clearest and most succinct thoughts on the issue of the freedom of the will. In this letter he reiterated many key concepts of *Freedom of the Will* and explored the implications of the issue for pastoral ministry and one’s relationship with God. “A bad will, or an evil disposition of heart” was the essence of one’s sin and the sum of one’s wickedness.<sup>81</sup> A bad will was also the key to seeing our inability to merit salvation or God’s favour. Ignoring this and emphasizing humanity’s ability to choose God prevents people from

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<sup>77</sup> The real problem that Edwards addressed was that of the deist slogan that ignored the critical distinction between reason as a faculty and reason as a rule. First they state it is a rule of reasoning, but then they proceed to use it in two other, very different senses: sometimes as a faculty of judgment, and other times as an opinion that appears rational to us. Edwards believed that reason can never be used as a rule of thinking. To speak that way makes no sense. For reason is a faculty not a rule and to call a faculty a rule is a contradiction in terms. The faculty of reason in and of itself does not and cannot tell us what is true; that is the function of a rule. Ibid., 214.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>79</sup> Calvinists believed that such doctrines led to “works of righteousness” and to a loss of a sense of absolute dependence on God. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 138.

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “To the Reverend Joseph Bellamy, January 15, 1747,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 217.

<sup>81</sup> Stephen Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards. A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought*, 185.



being “brought off from all their dependence on their own righteousness.” In fact, “things of this kind have visibly been the main hindrance of the true humiliation and conversion of sinners, in the times of awakening, that have been in this land.”<sup>82</sup> Edwards’s *Original Sin* (1758) provided a general defence of that doctrine which proclaims the depravity of the human heart and the imputation of Adam’s first sin to his posterity. In *Freedom of the Will* Edwards explained his views this way: “The conversion of a sinner is not owing to a man’s self-determination, but to God’s determination, and to eternal election, which is absolute, and depending upon the sovereign will of God, and not on the free will of man.”<sup>83</sup>

From his conversion experience onwards, Edwards was convinced that God’s will determines all things. Like a grand conductor, God orchestrates and brings to pass all things according to his will.<sup>84</sup> God’s absolute sovereignty and his own personal inability convinced him that man is as free as his will is free. “A man is free to do what he wills, but not to do what he does not will.”<sup>85</sup> Edwards stated that a man is a free and responsible being because he is the author of his own acts and because he is determined to act by nothing outside of himself, but by his own views, convictions, inclinations, feelings and dispositions. “His acts are the true products of the man and reveal what his true nature is.”<sup>86</sup> In his definition, Edwards argued that something drives the will or causes it to choose one thing over another. The will is determined. “It is that motive, which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest that determines the will.”<sup>87</sup> Motives underlie the will and direct it or the will acts in agreement with these motives. The will chooses what the will wants and this motive behind the will or our nature determines what the will wants. “This motive may be understood as the chief essence of our nature, or our defining characteristic.” Edwards referred to it as our “nature.” He associated this line of thought with what he referred to as “moral inability,” which consists in the opposition or want [lack] of inclination. He conceded that we have a natural ability to will and then to do many things, but because of sin, “we have moral inability and

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<sup>82</sup> Shortly after settling in to Stockbridge he wrote to his friend John Erskine, “I hope in a short time to be at leisure to resume my design of writing something on the Arminian controversy ... but first to write something on free will and moral agency ... strictly examining the modern notions of those things ... and endeavouring also to bring the great objections and outcries against the Calvinist divinity from these topics, to the test of the strictest reasoning.” Jonathan Edwards, “To the Reverend John Erskine,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 491.

<sup>83</sup> Nichols. *Jonathan Edwards. A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought*, 186.

<sup>84</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Freedom of the Will,” in Paul Ramsey, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Freedom of the Will*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 1 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1957), 375-83.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>86</sup> W. P. Jeanes, “Jonathan Edwards’s Conception of Freedom of the Will,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14, no. 1, (1 March 1961): 7.

<sup>87</sup> Edwards, “Freedom of the Will,” 142.

this inability governs the will.”<sup>88</sup> At the fall of Adam, humanity not only fell out of favour with God, but also lost the ability to please God or achieve righteousness.<sup>89</sup> In such postulations, we see again Edwards’s approach of treating the hostile doctrines with a mix of logical reasoning and the inescapable reality of his personal experience, blended together in a detailed, albeit at times convoluted, defence of his position.

(d) *Enlightenment Ethics and Morals*

Enlightenment thinkers of the first half of the eighteenth century attempted to establish a new moral philosophy as a science equivalent to the new natural philosophy, or natural science. Modern thinkers were striving to establish firm foundations for knowledge that would be universally valid for all. Christendom, ever since the Reformation, had been torn by the absolutist dogmas of warring religious authorities. The grand hope of the modern moral philosophers was that they could discover universally valid moral standards with which they could adjudicate competing absolute claims and in effect stand above them.<sup>90</sup> The term “moral sense” was first suggested by Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), and his principal follower, Francis Hutcheson, a professor of moral theology at Glasgow. Hutcheson argued in *An Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good* (1725) that human beings have disinterested motives, namely, they can act for the sake of the good of others, and not merely for their self-advantage. This endeavour to ground morality exclusively on the benevolence of human nature appears also in Hume’s moral philosophy. For him, as with Hutcheson, morality is an entirely human affair based on human nature and not on divine will.<sup>91</sup> Claiming that the moral sense is the faculty by which we distinguish between right and wrong, members of the British School of Moral Sense argued that it is possible to have knowledge of good and evil without and prior to knowledge of God.<sup>92</sup>

Edwards owned and read many works of Enlightenment moral theorists, such as Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry in the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (1728) and Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), *A Treatise on Human Nature*

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 156-62.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 302-3.

<sup>90</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. 464.

<sup>91</sup> Zakai, “The Age of Enlightenment,” 91.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 91.

(1739), and *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751).<sup>93</sup> He cultivated the habit of reading the works of others even if he totally disagreed with their conclusions. In a letter to the Scottish clergyman John Erskine in 1755 he wrote, “I had before read ... that book of Mr David Hume’s, which you speak of. I am glad of an opportunity to read such corrupt books especially when written by men of considerable genius; that I may have an idea of the notions that prevail in our nation.”<sup>94</sup> Edwards also rejected “that notion of virtue maintained by My Lord Shaftesbury, [Francis] Hutcheson and George Turnbull, which seems to be most in vogue at this day, according to which all mankind are naturally disposed to virtue and are without any native depravity.”<sup>95</sup>

Edwards’s writings of the 1750s brought to a conclusion his lifelong attempt to construct the whole world around him in accordance with the worldview he acquired during his conversion moment.<sup>96</sup> As in the realm of nature and history, he strove to assert God’s sovereignty, beauty and excellency in the sphere of ethics and morals. “It is chiefly by the exercise of moral government that God displays his moral perfections which are in a peculiar manner the glory of the divine nature.”<sup>97</sup> Edwards linked morality and theology: “Spiritual understanding primarily consists (in the sense) of the moral beauty of divine things.” True morality “consists in the beauty of moral perfections of God, which wonderfully shines forth in every step” of the “method of salvation;” a method of delivering “us from sin and hell,” and of bringing us to the “happiness which consists in the possession and enjoyment of moral good, in a way sweetly agreeing with God’s moral perfections.”<sup>98</sup>

In Edwards’s mind, ethics and morals could not be separated from divine activity in time since in these spheres the Deity constantly advances his work of redemption for fallen humanity. Edwards aimed to show that “virtue must chiefly consist in love to God” who is

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<sup>93</sup> Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of the Enlightenment*, 312.

<sup>94</sup> Sereno E. Dwight, *The Works of President Edwards with a Memoir of His Life* (New York: 1829-30), 550. Cited in Johnson, “Jonathan Edwards’s Background of Reading,” 210.

<sup>95</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend Thomas Foxcroft, February 11, 1757,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 696.

<sup>96</sup> Now in exile on a frontier settlement at Stockbridge, Edwards dedicated his thought and energy to the issue of ethics and morals. His personal state of exile afforded time and a quiet place where he could grapple with pressing ideological and theological issues that had been long on his mind. He transformed his home in the frontier settlement of Stockbridge into a kind of writing laboratory. Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment*, 311-12.

<sup>97</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany No. 1127,” in Amy Plantinga Pauw, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies” (Entry Nos. 833-1152)*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 20 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 497.

<sup>98</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, in John E. Smith, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Religious Affections*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 271-4.

“the head of the universal system of existence; the foundation and fountain of all being,”<sup>99</sup> and to demonstrate that God is the sole source of ethics and morals. For Edwards, “nothing is of the nature of true virtue ... in which God is not the first and the last.”<sup>100</sup> Edwards insisted that God “will take care that the world of mankind will be regulated with respect to its moral state and so will maintain a good moral government over the world of mankind.”<sup>101</sup> For Edwards, true virtue consists in “benevolence to Being in general.” Therefore, a true system of morals and ethics is inseparable from religion because the former is grounded on the latter. Edwards claimed that virtue is by necessity grounded on God since the deity “is the head of the universal system of existence.”<sup>102</sup>

Edwards addressed *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765) specifically to the eighteenth-century philosophers. Unlike in other works, he did not quote scripture, although he did appeal to its authority for the theistic basis of his ethics. His goal was to establish an analysis in which, if one granted merely a few essential principles of Christian theology, one would be forced to reconsider the whole direction of eighteenth-century moral philosophy.<sup>103</sup> In *Charity and Its Fruits* or *Christian Love as Manifested in Heart and Life* (1738), he attempted to deal with the Christian moral life against the Enlightenment’s concept of moral theory, asserting that only from “love to God springs love to man,” hence “without love to God there can be no true honor or virtue.”<sup>104</sup> It is perhaps here, in his mature statement of the all-embracing nature of his sovereign God in all matters of human conduct and virtue, that Edwards most fully articulated that theo-genetic concept that gave cogency to all his religious and philosophical tenets, the hall mark of his religious and philosophical persona.

#### IV CONCLUSION

Edwards was aware of the context in which he operated and remained confident and hopeful. He read widely and the scope and content of that reading profoundly shaped the battles he would fight. In his various responses to the panoply of alien forces he encountered, he strategically shaped himself into the public defendant he believed necessary to win the war.

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<sup>99</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Nature of True Virtue,” in Paul R. Ramsey, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Ethical Writing*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 8 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989), 550-1.

<sup>100</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany No. 1208,” in *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 1153-1360), 131.

<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany No. 864,” in *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 833-1152), 95.

<sup>102</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Nature of True Virtue,” 560.

<sup>103</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 464.

<sup>104</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Charity and Its Fruits,” in *Jonathan Edwards Ethical Writings*, 137, 142.

The central principle in Edwards's thought was the sovereignty of God. The central practical motive in his life and work was his conviction that nothing was more momentous personally than one's eternal relationship to God. The main weapon in his battle would be his pen. In his writings he turned his intellectual prowess to rigorously following out the implications of these convictions for understanding humanity's eternal destiny.<sup>105</sup>

Edwards was resilient and high on moral character, constantly aware of how he was perceived by others who were aware of his values. He set himself to be an intentional role model whose values, attitudes, and behaviours motivated others. He embodied the values and qualities he professed, creating the self as an example of someone who could be trusted. His personal experience of God's sovereignty was key to his theology. Edwards's knowledge was convictional, based on his conversion experience which reorientated him to a new ground in existence and inevitably played out in what he thought and did. His vastly different vision of reality transformed his vocational understandings and practice. For Edwards, we do live and move and have our being in God. This enabled him to move against and beyond the threats with which he contended. First and foremost Edwards constructed his life in conformity with Christ, with the intent of providing others with a window through which they could see God.

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<sup>105</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 4.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE INTERNAL THREATENING OTHER

#### I INTRODUCTION

Puritanism was itself, by expressed intention, a vast and extended revival movement.<sup>1</sup> In the church of Jonathan Edwards's father at East Windsor during his childhood, there had been "four or five" outpourings of the Spirit in "my honoured father's parish, which has in times past been a place favoured with mercies of this nature above any on the western side of New England excepting Northampton."<sup>2</sup> Edwards experienced the first of two remarkable seasons of personal awakening in which he was "very much affected for many months" when he was only nine.<sup>3</sup> Also, in 1716, aged twelve, he wrote to his older sister Mary: "Through the wonderful mercy of God there hath been in this place a very remarkable stirring and pouring out of the Spirit of God .... About thirteen have been joined to the church in an estate of full communion."<sup>4</sup> Edwards was very impressed with his grandfather Solomon Stoddard's "extraordinary successes in the conversion of many souls."<sup>5</sup> Northampton parishioners had experienced more awakenings under the powerful preaching of Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729) than had East Windsor under the preaching of his father Timothy Edwards (1669-1758), with five separate seasons of revival: 1679, 1683, 1696, 1712 and 1718.<sup>6</sup> The regional awakening of 1712 had convinced many, including Edwards's grandfather and uncle William Williams, that revival should be the church's priority.<sup>7</sup> Edwards's immersion in this environment established the path that he would follow, not only in his ongoing commitment to revivalism but in the role that he would play. The example of his ministerial forebears that he would adopt was one of spiritual guide and orchestration, rather than public participation.

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<sup>1</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1972), 281. It should be noted that Puritanism was not in itself a revival movement in the same sense as that of the American Awakenings, since it lacked itinerants, crowd access and appeal, and mass expressions. Its "revivalism" was more in terms of individual piety and order, rather than mass meetings. In this sense, Edwards (and by extension much of the emerging American colonial scene) may be seen as post-Puritan. However, the impetus to personal piety provided by Puritanism remained an undercurrent for the colonial revivals.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton," in C. C. Goen, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 4 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1972), 154.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in George S. Claghorn, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 16 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 790.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Mary Edwards," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>7</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 117.

In the previous chapter we saw that the awakenings of the 1730-40s were met with an array of alien forces, in response to which Edwards consciously cultivated his skills as a writer within the overall development of his persona. Yet it was not only in the engagement with such hostile forces that this development occurred. It was as much in terms of the emerging conflicts within revivalism that the battle continued. Kindling the awakenings inadvertently caused local chaos and disorder in terms of the uncontrolled responses they generated. The overt lack of control caused inevitable antagonism and conflict, which in turn led to the demand for greater control. Typically, Edwards sought by various literary means to craft a more reflective defence of revivalism to give coherence to the various narratives of revival. The control he sought to achieve was thus both a factor in and a product of the maturational process of his persona.

Within the corpus of Edwards's written works there is ample evidence of his growing encounter with the chaos and the various means he adopted to counter and control such unwanted and unjustifiable eruptions, in order to legitimize revivalism. In particular, his letters and sermons, some of which were refined into more formal and more extensive treatises, show an emerging concern to bring order to what was, at least initially, seen as chaotic. It is the analysis of these letters and sermons which provides the evidence of his conscious striving to further fashion himself as a spokesperson of a legitimate order of revival. However, while the text of Edwards's writings is of primary interest, the prevailing immediate context, in both its religious and its literary aspects, throws light on how and why Edwards the writer was shaped in his time. Therefore, before embarking on an analysis of his own writings, we will take a brief look at that context by way of illuminating background information.

## **II PREAMBLE: RELIGIOUS AND LITERARY BACKGROUND**

### *(a) Religious Background*

The Great Awakening of New England began in Northampton, Massachusetts. Since Stoddard's death in 1729, Edwards had proclaimed his carefully thought out sermons to these same parishioners whom he initially believed were insensible to the things of religion. Then, in 1733, he began to notice signs of change and later, in 1734, while he was preaching a closely reasoned sermon series on *Justification By Faith*, the congregation became very responsive to his exhortations. During the following spring and summer this response continued until the town became so full of "Christian spirit in Love to Enemies, and love ....

joy ... and distress.”<sup>8</sup> Edwards concluded it was a work of the Holy Spirit and a vindication of the sound doctrine in his sermons.<sup>9</sup>

News of the remarkable transformation of Northampton spread quickly to the surrounding towns in the Connecticut River valley and they too experienced similar religious stirrings. This, combined with Presbyterian awakenings in the Middle Colonies, convinced prominent theologians and ministers in Boston and overseas in England and Scotland that a major revival was on the horizon. Ushered in by George Whitefield, the Grand Itinerant, this much greater awakening which began in Old England was experienced by New England between 1740 and 1743. The “frontier revival” of 1734-35 and this later “great awakening” stirred up immense controversy between supporters led by Jonathan Edwards and the influential Boston minister Benjamin Colman and opposers led by the Congregationalist Charles Chauncy and the Anglican Timothy Cutler.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the conflict, Edwards exercised his considerable talents as a thinker and writer to authenticate and promote the movement.

(b) *Literary Background*

The eighteenth century was a period of extensive literary development and intentional cultivation. Of particular importance to this study are the two forms adopted by Edwards as his chief means of articulation, namely, the letter and the sermon. Formulas and styles of letter writing that developed in the classical period were carried over into the Middle Ages where they found a place in manuals of letter writing that were produced in increasing numbers well into the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Letters provided a means of achieving and maintaining a position in the international company of scholars and of staying in touch with new developments in scholarship.<sup>12</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, the erudite letter

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Reverend Benjamin Colman,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 53.

<sup>9</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 286.

<sup>11</sup> The letter was well established as a literary format in classical times by the Greeks and Romans, and students who received a classical education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were exposed to the letters of the great classical writers. Cicero established a tradition by publishing his collected letters in 68BC and set a pattern that was followed for centuries thereafter. John W. Howland, *The Letter Form and the French Enlightenment: The Epistolary Paradox* (New York: Lang Publishing, 1991), 15. See also Linda C. Mitchell, “Letter-Writing Instruction Manuals in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century England,” in Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell, eds., *Letter Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> See Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).



was widely accepted as a publication medium equal to that of a journal.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the sermon of Edwards's day was at the height of its formal development and combined "intellectual substance, artistic form, and popular currency in a distinctive amalgam rarely equalled by a single literary form in the subsequent history of American literature. Edwards's sermons synthesized and artistically harmonized the many diverse aspects of his thought and life."<sup>14</sup> In addition to his formal education and the personal examples of his father Timothy and grandfather Stoddard, there were other significant literary or rhetorical influences in Edwards's first years of preaching. Two books on preaching that he read, John Edwards's *The Preacher* (London, 1705) and Cotton Mather's *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (Boston, 1726) are both mentioned early in Edwards's "Catalogue of Books."<sup>15</sup> Some specific points of note concerning the use of these two forms follow.

Letter writing was a genre of intellectual and literary significance within the transatlantic literary community and a necessity for those who lived far apart in an age before the convenience of modern communications.<sup>16</sup> Writers formulated their opinions within a transatlantic context and those opinions in turn established a number of views and patterns of response within that same transatlantic world.<sup>17</sup> This practice was taken up by the Puritan transatlantic network that existed between 1620 and 1730. As Cotton Mather wrote: "When the distance of the huge Atlantic separates Bretheren from one another, one Method unto which we must resort for Maintaining the communion of saints is the epistolary."<sup>18</sup> Epistolary exchanges discussed controversial issues, the practice of using itinerant preachers, the writing of revival tracts, and theological treatises of the revival. Evidence shows that printers were drawn into the epistolary circuit. John Lewis's print shop in London was often used as a

<sup>13</sup> The transition of correspondence to the journal as a medium for publishing can be seen throughout the seventeenth century. David A. Kronick, "The Commerce of Letters: Networks and 'Invisible Colleges' in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Europe," *The Library Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (January 2001): 31.

<sup>14</sup> The sermon as a formal literary unit consisted of three main divisions, Text, Doctrine and Application. The lecture was differentiated from the sermon only through the altered proportions in the doctrine and application. Whereas in the sermon the Application was usually a little longer than the Doctrine and often several times as long, in the lecture the Doctrine was substantially longer than the Application.

Wilson H. Kinnach, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 10 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), xiii, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Peter J. Thuesen, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Catalogues of Books*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 26 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 26-7, 54.

<sup>16</sup> The erudite letter provided freedom of information exchange and expression of ideas because it existed, for the most part, outside the scrutiny of governmental censorship systems and the restraints of religious and national controversies. Kronick, "The Commerce of Letters: Networks and 'Invisible Colleges' in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Europe," 29.

<sup>17</sup> Susan O'Brien, "A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (October 1986): 820.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689-1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). 86.

clearing house for correspondence and revival literature. He printed and edited a weekly revival newspaper.<sup>19</sup>

Edwards himself was actively involved in a letter-writing network that had a core of leading ministers including Benjamin Colman and Thomas Prince, Sr. of New England; James Robe, William McCulloch, John McLaurin, and John Erskine of Scotland; and English ministers Watts, Guyse and Doddridge.<sup>20</sup> This network played a significant role in Edwards's life and ministry, providing mutual support and encouragement which enabled Edwards to work through the complex issues related to the controversies of the awakenings. It also gave coherence to the various narratives of revivals on the Continent and in England, Scotland and British North America from the frontier revival of 1734-35 to the greater awakening of 1740-1743 and beyond. Some of Edwards's most striking compositions were delivered in the epistolary mode. His letters demonstrate his well developed sense of the epistolary conventions of his day and his skill in utilizing those conventions, a technique "which led him to develop respect for subjective involvement, a carefully modulated acknowledgement of the reader, and a voice precisely adapted to the subject at hand. As an inhabitant of the epistolary culture of the eighteenth century, Edwards was comfortable and effective within the genre."<sup>21</sup>

Several phases in Edwards's development as a writer of sermons can be identified.<sup>22</sup> The first period (1722-27) can be described as a period of apprenticeship; the second period (1727-42) is that in which Edwards achieved mastery of the sermon; the final period (1742-58), a truly multifaceted period, is best described as a time of permutation, in both Edwards's public life and his literary pursuits.<sup>23</sup> Of all the innovations in sermon composition, for Edwards the most notable was preparing sermons for publication, of converting oratory into literature.<sup>24</sup> Several publications, *God Glorified in the Work of Redemption* (1731), *A Divine and Supernatural Light* (1734) and *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741), established his reputation in New England and overseas. Edwards took considerable pains to send his

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<sup>19</sup> The detail of the publication was as follows: John Lewis ed. *Christian's Amusement containing Letters Concerning the Progress of the Gospel both at home and abroad etc. together with an account of the Waldenses and Albigenses* (London, 1740), printed by John Lewis, September 1740 – March 1741, 4 pp., price 1d. O'Brien, "A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755," 826 n61.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 819.

<sup>21</sup> Claghorn, *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> The phases of Edwards's development as a writer of sermons are impressively treated in Volumes 10, 14, 17, 19, 22 and 25 of Yale's *Works of Jonathan Edwards*.

<sup>23</sup> Kinnach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, 91.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 108.

sermons to the printers in their best stylistic dress. Of the many revisions perhaps the most interesting is his “phrase polishing,” a technique observable whenever one of his manuscripts was prepared for the press.<sup>25</sup> Edwards’s relationship with the press and how much he was involved in, or had control over the printing of sermons, is difficult to determine.<sup>26</sup>

The methodical nature of Jonathan Edwards and the filial piety of his family have made it possible to amass the bulk of his sermon manuscripts and related papers. The twelve hundred or so sermons and the attendant sermon notebooks, scripture notebooks, and miscellaneous manuscript writings now collected at the Yale Beinecke Library vividly illustrate the day-to-day working life of Edwards.<sup>27</sup> Edwards codified his sermons and maintained a library of his own sermons which he studied and utilized in his efforts to fulfil his preaching duties. For Edwards, re-examination of old sermons inevitably facilitated the production of new sermons.<sup>28</sup> Many revisions were made to adapt the sermon to a different auditory. Some revisions were determined by purely aesthetic or rhetorical criteria.<sup>29</sup>

In order to meet the challenges of constant sermon making, Edwards gradually evolved an impressive apparatus of cross-referenced journals, notebooks and sermon manuscripts. These reveal much about his working habits and the total regimen of his life. His attention to detail and well organized filing system facilitated the efficient production of the many outstanding pieces he produced. His notebook resources can be divided into two general groups: a large group devoted to the recording and developing of ideas and a small group devoted to the planning and regulating of his literary activities.<sup>30</sup> Included in this latter group are his Diary

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>26</sup> There is little evidence concerning the specifically literary aspects of his transactions with his publishers, the printers S. Kneeland and T. Green. There is some evidence that Edwards was involved, directly or through an agent, in the actual process of preparing the printed work. There are letters to the Rev. Thomas Foxcroft of Boston in which Edwards gave directions for the insertion of new material in works then in the press. Ibid., 115-16.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson H. Kinnach, “Jonathan Edwards’s Sermon Mill,” *Early American Literature* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1975): 167.

<sup>28</sup> His notes indicate that many of the sermons were re-preached once, twice, or three times and a number are marked as having been preached five, six or seven times. Revisions made after a period of years can be identified by changes in Edwards’s hand, orthography, abbreviations, and symbols. As a result of the eighteenth century practice of making ink by mixing powder with various liquid mediums, the ink Edwards used varies in colour, tone, and consistency (when viewed through a binocular microscope) from month to month, and sometimes even from week to week. Thus, in almost all cases it is possible to differentiate revisions made for a re-preaching from those made at the time of composition. Ibid., 177 n5.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>30</sup> In the first group are the Miscellanies, Shadows of Divine Things, the Mind, Notes on the Apocalypse, Notes on the Scripture and Miscellaneous Observations on the Holy Scriptures. Virtually all of these are cross-referenced to the sermon corpus, and appear to have been his essential work-books. All show signs of continual reworking throughout his entire life. Kinnach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-23*, 51.

and Resolutions and three more specifically functional types of notebooks, the “Catalogue of Books,” the “Sermon Notebook” and “Subjects of Enquiry.”<sup>31</sup>

One final point which impinged on Edwards’s literary endeavours is worthy of note, namely, his concept of the public authority of the minister. In Colonial New England the minister was the voice of authority in most community affairs. In his early *Miscellanies*, Edwards toyed with the mystery of the call and pondered the limits and possibilities of the role of a minister. Could he command the people, or even the world, as a divine messenger?<sup>32</sup> He was in full agreement with his predecessors respecting the exalted status of the preacher. Miscellany No. 40 contains his early speculations upon the powers which would inhere in effective preaching.

Without doubt, ministers are to teach men what Christ would have them to do, and to teach them who doth these things and who doth them no; that is, who are Christians and who are not ...Thus, if I in a right manner am become the teacher of a people, so far as they ought to hear what I teach them, so much power I have. Thus, if they are obliged to hear me only because they themselves have chosen me to guide them, and therein declared that they thought me sufficiently instructed in the mind of Christ to teach them, and because I have the other requisites of being their teacher, then I have power as other ministers have in these days. But if it was plain to them that I was under the infallible guidance of Christ, and that I was sent forth to teach the world the will of Christ, then I should have power in all the world. I should have the power to teach them what they ought to do, and they would be obliged to hear me; I should have power to teach them who were Christians and who not, and in this likewise they would be obliged to hear me.<sup>33</sup>

This early entry demonstrates Edwards’s characteristic propensity to think through every important issue that confronted him. He insists upon a personal formulation of his heritage in his own written words.<sup>34</sup> Edwards’s position and abilities make him “the chosen one,” exalted

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany 40,” in Thomas A. Schafer, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 13 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984), 222-3.

<sup>34</sup> Kimnach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, 21.

and even transfigured by his calling.<sup>35</sup> He is invested with a capacity and right to instruct, lead, and judge his people (No. qq).<sup>36</sup> He has no pretention to civil authority, but in the all important moral and spiritual realm he is, of all human beings, supremely authoritative.<sup>37</sup> Even at this early stage of his career, Edwards was conscious of his own public role, a consciousness that was to become consolidated in due course.

### III CHAOS GENERATED

In the two key periods of revival witnessed and experienced by Edwards, there were eruptions of disorderly responses to the revivalist preaching. Typically, Edwards detailed many of these responses in his letters and sermons, some of which were expanded into more formal treatises. His various writings also reveal much of the antagonism that attended these phenomena.

#### (a) *Frontier Revival (1734-1735)*

In the eighteenth century, influence depended largely on patronage and, as a young minister, Edwards recognized that the response of the highly influential Boston minister Benjamin Colman and his associates would be crucial to his cause.<sup>38</sup> The first published version of *A Faithful Narrative* (1737) was cast in the form of a letter on May 30, 1735, from Edwards to Colman.<sup>39</sup> Colman was impressed and shared the letter with his associates Guyse and Watts in London. The letter took on a life of its own, igniting flames of revival in England, Scotland and America. It engendered intense interest in conversion experiences and paved the way for Whitefield's historic tours in the Colony. Suddenly, Edwards had an international audience. In his letter, Edwards provided a historical overview of the progress of the revival, mentioning some of the experiences of the people that were, from his perspective, an "extraordinary dispensation of providence." Prior to this mini-revival, Edwards believed that Northampton was already "the largest church in New England," but lately "persons have

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<sup>35</sup> In *Miscellanies*, Nos. mm, qq, and 40, Edwards attempted to define to his own satisfaction the nature of the call, the limits and quality of a minister's influence in society, and the power in preaching or teaching. *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellany qq," in *Jonathan Edwards The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500)*, 188-9.

<sup>37</sup> Kimmach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Since the death of Cotton Mather, Colman had played a key role in uniting Massachusetts to international Calvinistic evangelicalism. Despite their current ecclesiastical arguments with the westerners in Hampshire County over the attempted settlement of Robert Breck, Colman and his circle of friends were firmly allied with William Williams and his clan in this larger cause. They shared the deep hope that New England would be a model of genuine awakening. Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Benjamin Colman," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 99-110.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Reverend Benjamin Colman," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 48-58.

thronged in” and “there have been a great multitude hopefully converted.” The movement seemed to affect “all sorts, high and low, rich and poor, wise and unwise, old and young.” So “extraordinary” was this awakening in its extent that some people “have suspected it.”<sup>40</sup>

(b) *Publication of a Faithful Narrative*

As soon as Edwards’s lengthy letter arrived, Colman took the liberty of making an “accurate and judicious abridgment,” which he attached to two sermons preached by William Williams, Edwards’s uncle. This work of “honoured Uncle Williams” was Colman’s vehicle for presenting the first account of Edwards’s revival to the public.<sup>41</sup> Colman reduced to eighteen pages what would become later a 132 page book.<sup>42</sup> Isaac Watts testified that the abridging was “so well performed that had it been but twice as long as it is it would not have been printed. Williams’ sermons, with the extracts from Edwards’s narrative appended, were released by the Boston printers in mid-December 1736.”<sup>43</sup>

Colman confided to Watts that “I find Mr Edwards is not altogether pleased with the liberty we have taken of so general an extract.”<sup>44</sup> Watts replied to Colman on February 28, 1737, that Colman’s extract had exceeded his expectations and given him

such religious pleasure that he longed for a more complete account of it (because) we are of the opinion that so strange and surprising work of God that we have not heard anything like it since the Reformation, nor perhaps since the days of the apostles, should be published, and left upon record with all its attending circumstances, and therefore we join in subscribing five pounds towards the printing of the narrative [in Boston].<sup>45</sup>

Again on April 2, Watts wrote to Colman renewing the offer to help underwrite a printing of the entire narrative in Boston “under your corrections, etc, and with any additions you think proper.” The Londoners still longed for it “at large.”<sup>46</sup> Colman then decided that Edwards’s work would be better handled in London and packed off the entire manuscript around May 1, 1737.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 54-5.

<sup>41</sup> The abridgment centred on a description of the awakening at Northampton and its spread throughout the Valley and included many details regarding the experiences of the new converts. It omitted much of Edwards’s reiteration and excised completely his two case histories. Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 34.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>44</sup> Printed in Milner, *The Life, Times and Correspondence of Isaac Watts*, 553-4. Cited in Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 35 n2.

<sup>45</sup> *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2d Ser., 9, 358, 36 n3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 36 n4.

Colman's belief that Edwards was "not altogether pleased with the liberty" he had taken was mistaken: it was Uncle Williams who was unhappy. Some time in the spring of 1737, Colman wrote to Edwards a letter (now lost, apparently) apologizing for whatever offence had been caused. Edwards wrote back:

You mention, Sir, my being displeased at the liberty taken in the extract at the end of my Uncle Williams's sermons: certainly somebody has misrepresented the matter to you. I always looked upon it an honor too great for me, for you to be at the trouble to draw an extract of my letter to publish to the world, and that it should be annexed to my honoured Uncle Williams's sermons; and my main objection against it was that my Uncle Williams himself never approved of its being put into his book. With regard to the letter itself that I wrote, which you have sent to Dr Watts and Dr Guyse, I willingly submit it to their correction, if they think fit to publish it after they come to see it. I am sensible there are some things in it that would not be best to publish in England.<sup>47</sup>

Whether displeased or not, Edwards's response reveals that he was acutely aware of the need to maintain and cultivate good rapport with his patrons to whom he paid due deference through his attitude of gratitude and humility.

Before sending it to the printers, Watts and Guyse wrote "a large preface" of fourteen pages and supplied the title by which (with variations) the work has been known ever since. Watts informed Colman in a letter, dated October 13, that he and Dr Guyse had "both read it over carefully, and have omitted many things in it, and by reading it learn more particularly how judicious your abridgment is, yet upon the whole we thought it best to publish the larger account and have made such apologies as we thought needful."<sup>48</sup> Near the end of their preface they added:

Upon the whole, whatever defects any reader may find or imagine in this narrative, we are well satisfied that such an eminent work of God ought not to be concealed from the world: and as it was the reverend author's opinion, so we declare it to be ours also, that 'tis very likely that this account of such an extraordinary and illustrious appearance of divine grace in the conversion of sinners, may, by the blessing of God, have a happy effect upon the minds of men,

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<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Reverend Benjamin Colman," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 69-70.

<sup>48</sup> *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 9.

towards the honor and enlargement of the kingdom of Christ, much more than any supposed imperfection in this representation of it can do injury.<sup>49</sup>

This quasi-apologetic terminology did not suit Edwards. One of the bound presentation copies of this first edition came to Yale College where Edwards inspected it and made several corrections in his own hand. As for defects in his work, the only ones he could see were those introduced gratuitously by foreign editors.<sup>50</sup> On the fly-leaf he wrote:

It must be noted that the Rev. Publishers of the ensuing narrative, by much abridging of it, and altering the phrase and manner of expression, and not strictly observing the words of the original, have through mistake, published some things diverse from fact, which is the reason that some words are crossed out; and besides there are some mistakes in the preface, which are noted in the margin.

J. Edwards.<sup>51</sup>

Edwards also marked a demurrer in the margin of Yale's copy and rewrote the paragraph almost completely for the American edition of 1738: "Upon the whole, we declare our opinion that this account of such an extraordinary and illustrious appearance of divine grace in the conversion of sinners, is very like by the blessing of God to have a happy effect, towards the honor and enlargement of the kingdom of Christ." Misrepresenting Edwards's conclusions to the public was something he was not willing to overlook. He exercised some personal oversight of the first American edition (called the third edition) for it incorporates all the corrections he made in Yale's presentation copy and several more besides. This provides a reasonably accurate text of what Edwards originally wrote.<sup>52</sup>

Edwards and Watts also quarrelled over the course by which a sinner passes from darkness to light, whether conversion is gradual or instantaneous. Watts's edition read: "If sinners are told that they trust too much to their own strength and righteousness, they cannot unlearn this practice all at once, and find not yet the appearance of any good, but all looks as dark as midnight to them."<sup>53</sup> Edwards crossed out "all at once." Not content with that, for the Boston edition of 1738 he rewrote the whole sentence:

If they are told that they trust too much to their own strength and righteousness, they go about to strive to bring themselves off from it, and it may be, think they

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<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Preface to the first edition," in Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 137.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.



have done it, when they only do the same thing under a new disguise, and still find no appearance of any good, but all looks as dark as midnight to them.<sup>54</sup>

Edwards avoided any language from which readers could infer that conversion is a gradual process. Though grateful for all his London editors' efforts on his behalf, he deemed the issue important enough to correct what he regarded as erroneous doctrine. What was presented to the public in his name was a matter of singular concern to him.

(c) *Opposition to "frontier revival"*

Edwards emerged as a leader in his own right in the 1734/5 Northampton revival that spread to thirty-two other communities in the Connecticut River Valley.<sup>55</sup> Many were sceptical, believing that he had led his people into fanaticism.<sup>56</sup> Edwards's former teacher Timothy Cutler wrote to a friend in England:

The Calvinistic scheme is in perfection about 100 miles from this place. Conversions are talked of *ad nauseam usque*. Sixty in a place undergo the work at once. Sadness and horror seize them and hold them for some days; then they feel an inwards joy, and it first shows itself in laughing at meeting. Others are sad for want of experiencing this work; and this takes up for the present the thoughts and talk of that country; and the canting question trumped about is, 'Are you going through?' i.e. conversion.<sup>57</sup>

Cutler viewed the awakening as mostly "whimsical appearances and fantastic shows." In a hostile report he prepared for the Bishop of London he disparaged Edwards's *Narrative* and those who supported it.<sup>58</sup> He depicted the four leading Boston clergymen who endorsed it as "men of the lowest form in learning and judgment, contracted in their thoughts."<sup>59</sup> Edwards he portrayed as "critical, subtle and peculiar" and "not very solid in disputation."<sup>60</sup> As a student he remembered him as "always a sober person but withal pretty recluse, austere and rigid." Edwards, he wrote, "continues his application [to study] and in such a degree that he is

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 165-6.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 21-2.

<sup>56</sup> The established clergy were familiar with various prophets, on both sides of the Atlantic, who stirred up the imagination, encouraged spiritual visions, claimed miracles, fostered strange behaviours and taught sensational doctrines, such as that the millennium or the Age of the Spirit was at hand. Word spread that the extraordinary transformation of Northampton was just such a fanatical outbreak. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 161.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from Timothy Cutler to Zachary Grey, June 5, 1735, in John Nichols, ed., *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 4 (London: 1822), 298. Cited in Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 161.

<sup>58</sup> Douglas C. Stenerson, "An Anglican Critique of the Early Phase of the great Awakening in New England: A Letter by Timothy Cutler," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, 30, no. 3 (July 1973): 480.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 483.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 482.

very much emaciated, and impaired in his health, and it is doubtful to me whether he will attain the age of forty.”<sup>61</sup> Edwards’s devotion to duty was damaging his health. As a young man he had resolved to “do whatever I think to be my duty, and .... never to lose one moment of time ... to live with all my might, while I do live” and to “maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking.”<sup>62</sup> Edwards was aware that “there were many that scoffed at” and ridiculed the revival and that its detractors were circulating “exceeding great misrepresentations and innumerable false reports.”<sup>63</sup> On a visit to Boston in 1739, he paid a courtesy call on his former teacher, now Boston’s leading Anglican priest. Cutler had just received news that his son who was in the navy had been killed. Edwards diplomatically avoided the subject on which they both knew they disagreed – the Connecticut Valley Awakenings.<sup>64</sup>

The awakening itself was remarkably short – five months – from early winter 1734 to late spring 1735. On June 1, 1735, the suicide of Joseph Hawley, Edwards’s uncle and a successful merchant, brought the Northampton revival to an abrupt end. In a letter to Benjamin Colman, Edwards struggled to explain the calamity in the light of the context of the awakening. Hawley had been for a considerable time greatly concerned about the condition of his soul, “till, by the ordering of a sovereign providence he was suffered to fall into a deep melancholy, a distemper that the family are very prone to; he was much overpowered by it; the devil took the advantage and drove him into despairing thoughts.”<sup>65</sup> The reason, obscure to Edwards in 1736, became clearer in the fervour of the 1740s.<sup>66</sup>

(d) *Edwards’s commitment to Revivalism*

In the years after the 1734-35 frontier revival there is clear evidence of a shift in Edwards’s historical consciousness.<sup>67</sup> Rekindling the revival after his uncle’s untimely death was

<sup>61</sup> Timothy Cutler, “To Bishop Edmund Gibson, May 28, 1739,” in Stenerson, “An Anglican Critique of the Early Phase of the Great Awakening in New England: A Letter by Timothy Cutler,” 482-3.

<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Resolutions,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 753-4.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Faithful Narrative,” in Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 188-9.

<sup>64</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 192-3.

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Benjamin Colman,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 58.

<sup>66</sup> One of the vexing problems in the Great Awakening was the doctrine of personal assurance. Some believed that personal assurance was the essence of saving faith and, in a disordered state of mind, committed suicide in order to avoid the sins and guilt they might incur in the future. Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 47.

<sup>67</sup> Edwards developed a whole new set of premises about the nature of time and the meaning of history where God’s redemptive activity was related more and more to the historical process as a whole. By 1739, when he preached his thirty sermons on redemption, Edwards was convinced that religious revivals and awakenings were inextricable from God’s overall redemptive plan in the order of time, and thus constitute the heart of the entire historical process. Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 132.

Edwards's consuming priority. In response, he preached three lengthy sermon series in an attempt to direct the course his congregation were taking.<sup>68</sup> The first was a nineteen-unit sermon preached in the winter of 1737-38 on the parable of the wise and foolish virgins of Matthew 25:1-12. In this picture of the church he told his parishioners that "the wise and foolish were mixed together." Not until Christ returned would it become apparent that only half of them were truly prepared. The crucial issue for Edwards was how to tell the difference between the wise and the foolish.<sup>69</sup> This sermon series laid the groundwork for another, *Charity and Its Fruits*, which became one of his best known works. It was an ideal sequel to the sermons on the wise and foolish virgins because many of the applications dealt with how one might tell if an apparent work of the spirit was genuine. The text I Corinthians 13:1-8 proclaimed, as Edwards put it, that "all that is distinguishing and saving and true Christianity be summarily comprehended in love." It followed, according to Edwards, that evidences of love (or their absence) were the best test by which "Christians may try their experience whether it be real Christian experience."<sup>70</sup> This series concluded with what became one of his most popular sermons, *Heaven is a World of Love*.<sup>71</sup>

The *Charity* sermons stood close to the heart of Edwards's whole theological enterprise. The very essence of reality for Edwards was the intra-trinitarian love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The only possible reason for God to create the universe was to extend that love to his creatures, through Christ's eternal redemptive love. Edwards's all-consuming passion for awakenings is explained by his conviction that the history of mankind is inextricably linked and determined by salvation history, born of God's eternal redemptive love in God the Son, and executed according to God's will and purposes via revivals. He came to view the ever so short awakening as a grand moment in redemptive history wherein he and his parishioners stood, for a brief moment, at the epicentre of human history. His treatise, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, published posthumously in 1774, originated in the series of thirty lecture-sermons on redemption that Edwards preached in the church in Northampton between March and August of 1739. In this series he tackled two issues: what God is doing in the world and what God is accomplishing through history.<sup>72</sup> Revival reassured Edwards in a

<sup>68</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 189.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Charity and Its Fruits," in Paul Ramsey, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Ethical Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 8 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989), 145.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 371, 375, 379.

<sup>72</sup> Edwards returned to these sermons in the 1750s while at Stockbridge but died before getting this treatise published. Some twenty years later, thanks to the efforts of his son Jonathan Edwards Jr. and his friend and confidant, the Scottish minister John Erskine, an edition of a *History of the Work of Redemption* (1774)

tangible way that God was active in his world specifically where Edwards was directing his energies for the Kingdom of God. That such divine interventions were attended by extraordinary responses did not discomfort him. Euphoria, albeit essentially chaotic, was appropriate!

(e) *Great Awakening (1740-1743)*

So desperate was Edwards to rekindle the awakening that he was willing to accept help from the great Puritan nemesis, Old England's Anglicans. News from across the Atlantic about George Whitefield, a young Anglican priest who was preaching to crowds of many thousands outdoors in England during the spring and summer of 1739, encouraged him greatly. In Northampton, Edwards eagerly followed the news which was reported in Boston newspapers and through networks of correspondents.<sup>73</sup> Learning of Whitefield's plans to come to New England, Edwards wrote to him on February 12, 1739/40, begging him to come to Northampton. He rejoiced that God had used such an unlikely vessel as the Church of England. "It has been to the refreshment of my soul that I have heard of one raised up in the Church of England to revive the mysterious, spiritual, despised, and exploded doctrines of the gospel, and full of a spirit of zeal for the promotion of real vital piety." Edwards also feared Whitefield would be "disappointed in New England, and will have less success here than in other places," because New Englanders were "more hardened than most of those places where you have preached hitherto."<sup>74</sup>

Whitefield accepted the invitation and made an initial visit to Northampton for one weekend in October, 1740. He spoke four times publicly and twice to small groups in Edwards's home. The normally reserved and private Mr. Edwards was much affected when Whitefield preached: "Good Mr. Edwards wept during the whole time of exercise. The people were equally affected; and in the afternoon, the power increased yet more .... Northampton people have recovered their first love."<sup>75</sup> Throughout his life Edwards readily accepted new ideas and employed them in his life and ministry. Whitefield's visit changed his conceptions of

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appeared in Edinburgh. This edition went through numerous revisions, and in 1793 an edition appeared in New England. Translations and numerous editions abounded in the nineteenth century and consequently this work stands among the most influential and widely regarded of Edwards's writings. Stephen J. Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards. A Guided Tour of His Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 142-3.

<sup>73</sup> Benjamin Colman was corresponding with Whitefield and forwarding intelligence to his Hampshire County allies. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 202.

<sup>74</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to George Whitefield, February 12, 1740," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 80-1.

<sup>75</sup> *George Whitefield's Journals* (London: 1960), .476. Cited in Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 49 n2.

how spiritual awakenings of monumental proportions could be achieved. This awakening radiated out from Boston and included the entire region. Whitefield's spectacular successes showed that awakenings were more likely to be generated by itinerants or visiting preachers than under the strict guidance of local clergy. Much of this awakening was continued by young New England pastors who adopted Whitefield's example of itinerating across the region preaching extemporaneously.<sup>76</sup> As revival fires were sweeping from Boston throughout New England during the spring, Edwards was enjoying a relatively modest awakening in Northampton, so he was ready to enlist outside help again. On June 9, 1741 he wrote to one of the most effective New England preachers, Eleazar Wheelock,<sup>77</sup> inviting him to "come up hither and help us since your labours have been much more remarkably blessed than mine."<sup>78</sup> Wheelock's visit was an outstanding success. Edwards's hunger for revival overcame any petty jealousies he might have harboured regarding whom God used to fan the fires. Facilitating this greater awakening using the talents of charismatic itinerants was readily adopted by Edwards as a legitimate means of kindling the awakening, and one which he dabbled in, in the ensuing months.

Itinerating, Jonathan Edwards arrived in Suffield on July 5, 1741.<sup>79</sup> After preaching to the congregation he retired to a nearby residence where he continued exhorting the assembly. Within minutes, a deafening roar of "Sobs, Groans, Screaches, Houlings and Yellings" exploded onto the village green and reverberated across the surrounding fields. Sinners languishing in spiritual distress crumpled to the ground, their bodies contorting with such violence, according to one witness, that "you would have thought their bones all broken, or rather they had no bones." Others experienced ecstatic release from their hellish "distress" and "were brought to different degrees of Peace & Joy, Some to Rapture." Edwards prayed with the writhing mass of "Children, Youths and aged persons of both Sexes" for the next several hours before his perennially weak frame gave way and he yielded his labours to "4 or

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<sup>76</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edward: A Life*, 214-6.

<sup>77</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Eleazar Wheelock," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 89-90.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>79</sup> Edwards administered the sacraments to nearly five hundred Suffield communicants, ninety-seven of whom joined the church. It was an extraordinary event – quite possibly the largest one day church admission ritual ever observed in colonial New England. In an exhaustive survey of church membership records from nearly 140 churches in eastern New England, J. Richard Olivas discovered no other parish that admitted as many new communicants in a single month as Edwards did at the July 5 sacrament in Suffield. J. Richard Olivas, "Great Awakenings: Time, Space, and the Varieties of Religious Revivalism in Massachusetts and Northern New England, 1740-1748" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 1997), 482-624. Cited in Douglas L. Winiarski, "Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley," *Church History* 74, no. 4 (December 2005): 683-4 n3.

5 private Xtians.”<sup>80</sup> The discovery of a letter written to Benjamin Colman by Samuel Phillips Savage, a pious Boston merchant and an energetic supporter of revivalism, provides an opportunity to re-imagine Edwards as an active promoter of the most radical dimensions of the evangelical new birth experience – a figure who spent time inciting the wild gesticulations of his audience.<sup>81</sup>

Just two days after the Suffield event on 8 July, Edwards arrived at Enfield – a small farming village located directly across the Connecticut River – and delivered the most memorable sermon of his career, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. The team that had ministered with him at Suffield arrived at Enfield to hear “Dear Mr. Edwards preach.” Before his sermon was completed there “was a great moaning and crying out throughout the whole house .... What shall I do to be saved? Oh, I am going to hell. O what shall I do for Christ?” Shrieks and cries were amazing, and Edwards was unable to finish the sermon.<sup>82</sup> To Edwards, these emotional excesses were evidence that his message – by the grace of God – had pierced the hearts of his audience. At Suffield and Enfield he was seen as a powerful revivalist who hovered above contorting bodies and rapturous groans. Edwards’s role in promoting religious enthusiasm is undeniable. There is no evidence to suggest that Edwards disapproved of the behaviour of the congregation. He apparently was very comfortable in this context. Though he came perilously close to enthusiasm, to membership of that “notoriously spirit-drenched tribe of hyper-zealous New Lights whose Pentecostal fascination with extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit” scandalized the Great Awakening in New England,<sup>83</sup> there is no record of Edwards’s participation in “Groaning, Screaching, Houling and Yelling” in public worship.

(f) *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*

What is extraordinary in *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* is not the doctrines but the sustained imagery which contributed greatly to the people’s response. Edwards employed so many images and addressed them so immediately to his hearers that they were left with no escape. His most infamous passage in this sermon reads:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath

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<sup>80</sup> “Appendix: The Savage Manuscript,” in Winiarski, “Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley,” 738.

<sup>81</sup> Winiarski, “Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley,” 689.

<sup>82</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 214-221.

<sup>83</sup> Winiarski, “Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley,” 691.

toward you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours...<sup>84</sup>

Edwards's skilful use of repetition and stark juxtaposition of terror and hope, as well as the sermon's raw immediacy, intensely personal tone, escalating emotional appeal, syllogistic structure, and pulsating rhythm have impressed literary scholars.<sup>85</sup> When Isaac Watts received the printed version of the sermon, he wrote on his copy, "A most terrible sermon, which should have had a word of Gospel at the end of it, though I think 'tis all true."<sup>86</sup>

The final preparation of *Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God* for the press should be viewed in the historical context of the Great Awakening, the triumphs of Whitefield's dramatic oratory, the surprising success of Edwards at Enfield, and finally, in the wider context of Edwards's growing reputation that rested largely upon the written word, even as early as 1741. It is a paradoxical case and is both the least and the most revised of his published sermons.<sup>87</sup> The manuscript variants of the sermon can be characterized as having a much larger proportion of encouraging, mild-toned pastoral advice than is anywhere to be found in the published version of *Sinners*, and the original Northampton draft seems to have the greatest percentage of such comparatively mild language, particularly in the last two-thirds of the application.<sup>88</sup> Edwards attempted a literary coup that utilized techniques already established in preparing for the press *God Glorified in the Work of Redemption* (1731), *A Divine and Supernatural Light* (1734) and *Discourses on Various Important Subjects* (1738). The product of his efforts is undoubtedly one of the most "literary" performances of his career, multiplying its effects exponentially.

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<sup>84</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout and Kenneth P. Minkema, eds., *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 89-105.

<sup>85</sup> Winiarski, "Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley," 686.

<sup>86</sup> Ola Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards 1703-1758* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 192.

<sup>87</sup> It is the least revised in that the printed sermon and the original manuscript are almost identical up to the beginning of the four Considerations concerning "that wrath that you are in such danger of." But the last three-sevenths of the sermon is probably quite different from any version of the sermon that was preached. Comparison of the printed text with the original Northampton manuscript, the later outline, and all manuscript revisions reveals that all the devices of revising, inserting, and restructuring were used to such an extent that the printed version is both a compound of all previous versions and unlike anything before it. Moreover, if the last two-thirds of the application, in a sermon where the Application is the most important major division, are virtually new and different, then the sermon is virtually different. Kimnach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, 113-14.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

(g) *Chaotic Excesses*

It was obvious to some that the revival was out of control. Previous eruptions of enthusiasm in the American colonies include the Antinomian Controversy, the Quaker insurgency of the 1650s and a number of lesser known seeker and sectarian movements ranging from Samuel Gorton's radical spiritists to the Ephrata Cloister, the Moravians, and the notorious Dutartre affair.<sup>89</sup> The anonymous testimony of a parishioner affected by the preaching of Benjamin Pomeroy did little to ease rising tensions. In it, he revealed he was so overcome by a heavenly vision that he fainted, only to awaken, in his vision, at the foot of a rugged mountain that blocked the path to the heavenly Canaan.

A giant dove appeared and carried the man, in his vision, to a great plain at the summit of the mountain. There, the anonymous writer confronted a fierce bull. A guardian figure appeared in this moment of danger – a heavenly angel of inexpressible beauty – and escorted the man safely past the raging bull and up to the gates of heaven where God and Christ sat enthroned in glory, surrounded by angels bowing and paying their homage and adoration to them. Looking down on the frightened pilgrim, Christ then opened a large book and “shewed me my name reten in Letters of blood.” The angel and the giant dove once again returned the traveller to the foot of the mountain where a horrid vista unfolded: “I see the mouth of hell open and the damned souls wallowing in the flames shrieking and houlung.” Satan rose out of the fire and “he told me he would have me.” Stricken in terror as the devil grinned and gnashed his teeth, the narrator heard a voice shouting Isaiah 41:10 “Be not dismayed I am thy God.” Buoyed by the booming scriptural verses, the author discovered the courage to renounce Satan. The devil plunged back into the flames with his “Ghastly crew,” and the visionist's senses returned. “I found my body all disordered with the Cramp.”<sup>90</sup>

Another popular account of “ecstatic transport” was that of two children, Noah Chappel and Mary Webster, who “were at night both in a kind of Trance & so remained for near 2 Days & 2 Nights.” Occasionally they cried out in terror, and they later reported having “sev'e conflicts with the Devil.” Yet, in other moments they were “calm & still, with their eyes open seeming as if they w'r writing or reading.” During the forty-eight hours in which they lay

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<sup>89</sup> All of these groups hailed from the radical wing of the Reformation and shared with eighteenth century evangelicals a fascination with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit's extraordinary gifts. Douglas L. Winiarski, “Souls Filled with Ravishing Transport: Heavenly Visions and the Radical Awakening in New England,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, 61, no. 1 (January 2004): 3-46. 10 n17.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.



together on the same bed, Chappel and Webster each “kept one spot between ’em” as their own, and if “but a hair” dropped into their space, they quickly snatched the object up, though both appeared to be blinded. Separated and carried back to their respective homes after they “came to their senses,” Chappel and Webster related identical stories. Both “pretended to be going to heaven. ... The Lad claimed to have travelled a great race in a Narrow road” while entranced. Satan had attempted to hinder his progress, but Christ appeared to bolster the boy’s resolve. Looking back down the road, Chappel spied young Mary Webster “coming after him,” and as he looked forward to the horizon he saw a “great City.” Once inside the walls, Chappel again encountered Jesus who presented him with the Book of Life. When Webster arrived, she found the young lad busily reading in a tome that was “bigger than any Book they had ever seen in the world.” On its pages were listed in “Golden Capitals” the names of numerous saints, as well as those of New Light luminaries George Whitefield, Eleazar Wheelock, and Benjamin Pomeroy.”<sup>91</sup> It was stories such as these that fed the hunger for more dramatic manifestations of spiritual experiences, which in turn led to more active urging by some more radical preachers.

An example of such urging was James Davenport (1716-57). A grandson of the founder of New Haven, a graduate of Yale at 16, tutored in divinity by Elisha Williams and ordained in 1738 at Suthold, Long Island, Davenport suffered from deep feelings of inferiority, and in seeking to compensate, he almost wrecked the revival single-handedly.<sup>92</sup> After hearing of Whitefield’s spectacular success, he gathered his congregation together and harangued them for twenty-four hours straight. He then collapsed. Shortly after he visited the Middle colonies, wading through waist deep snow to assault a neighbouring parish with the gospel. He became personally acquainted with Whitefield and by mid-summer of 1741 he was ready to lay siege to Connecticut. On July 18, he arrived in New London and preached his first sermon. Many in the congregation were terrified and cried out, the women were fainting and hysterical. Standing in the middle of the congregation Davenport screamed out, “Come to Christ, Come to Christ, Come away!” Leaving the congregation in a state of chaos, Davenport then went off singing through the streets of the town.<sup>93</sup> After New London, Davenport spent his time travelling up and down the coast summoning ministers to recount their spiritual experiences so that he could judge whether they were converted. Those who refused he denounced

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>92</sup> Goen, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 51.

<sup>93</sup> *The Diary of Joshua Hempstead of New London, Connecticut* (New London: 1901), 379. Hempstead was the justice of the peace. Cited in Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 52 n3.

publicly before returning to Southold for the winter. In the spring of 1742, Davenport resumed his preaching tour across Connecticut. During his absence the colony had enacted laws against vagrant preaching and he was arrested at Stratford. After a riotous trial at Hartford he was forcibly returned to Southold. Three weeks later he turned up in Boston and the local ministers denied him their pulpits and published a “Declaration” outlawing judging ministers, singing in the streets and encouraging laymen to usurp ministerial prerogatives. Ultimately Davenport was declared *non compos mentis* and deported to Southold.<sup>94</sup> Edwards had first-hand experience of Davenport’s excesses during his New London visit of 1743 when Davenport induced people to consign idolatrous apparel and heretical books to the flames. A number of ministers prevailed upon Edwards to go to New London to calm the storm caused by Davenport,<sup>95</sup> an activity that would occupy much of his time in the ensuing years.<sup>96</sup> These were the sorts of excesses that led Edwards to become aware of the need for some controls.

#### IV CONTROL MECHANISMS

From the outset of the revivals, Edwards had been a keen advocate of such individualistic outpouring of personal experience. However, as events progressed, he came not only to see the need for some controlling safeguards but also to fashion himself as an elder spokesperson with the responsibility of articulating such controls. His personal development in this regard was shaped by his need to balance his principled support of revival with the manifest need for some regulatory safeguards. This endeavour had two prongs to it, expressed in his personal self-discipline as regards his continued revivalist preaching and in the more ordered congregational discipline he sought for the people.

##### (a) *Self-discipline in sermons*

Edwards prepared his sermons from numerous notebooks and manuscript sermons in which he was drawing things together on both practical and theoretical levels. On the practical level he was attempting to systematize and thus make immediately available the voluminous corpus of notes and writings in which he had, over the years, developed his thought. On the theoretical level, he seems to have been engaged in a final “searching out” of the scriptures to

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 51-52, 60-1.

<sup>95</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 275.

<sup>96</sup> In a letter to Rev. Eleazar Wheelock, July 13 1744, Edwards expresses relief that Davenport has regained his sanity and thinks that he is now ready to “make a public, humble, and suitable recantation and confession of his errors.” Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Reverend Eleazar Wheelock,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 145-6.

facilitate a definitive formulation of the more abstruse but essential points in his theology. Finally, on the artistic level, he was apparently groping for the secret of persuasive historical narrative.<sup>97</sup>

The evidence from Edwards's working manuscripts reveals that his treatises were built up, more or less, from sermons in his file. Four of his treatises aimed at interpreting and defending the revival in New England - *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737), *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present State of Revival in New England* (1742) and *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746) - grew out of the 1200 or so sermons and the attendant sermon notebooks, scripture notebooks, and his miscellaneous manuscript writings. The intimate relationship between sermon and treatise first becomes apparent in 1738 with his publication of *Discourses on Various Important Subjects* (1738).<sup>98</sup> A similar operation may be observed with the publication of *The Distinguishing Marks of a work of the Spirit of God*. This work, first preached as a sermon in New Haven on 10 September, 1741, was printed that year "with great Enlargements" by Edwards, who not only amplified the work but wrote additions that must have tripled the length of the original, perhaps surprising those "Ministers and other Gentleman" who had earnestly desired that Edwards print the sermon. *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion* (1743) is much more of a treatise in form, although it too bears some of the formal features of the sermon.<sup>99</sup> While composing *Some Thoughts*, Edwards was preaching a series of sermons on the importance of religious affections which he would later refine and publish as *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746). For Edwards, true religion consists in holy affections.<sup>100</sup> The key to understanding what Edwards meant when he used the term "affections" is found in the difference between what he called a "merely notional understanding of something" and "being in some way inclined with respect to a particular object or doctrine."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Kinnach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, 71.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-5.

<sup>100</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New-England," in Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 297.

<sup>101</sup> "There is a distinction to be made between a mere notional understanding wherein the mind only beholds things in the exercise of a speculative faculty; and the sense of the heart, wherein the mind don't only speculate and behold, but relishes and feels. That sort of knowledge, by which a man has a sensible perception of amiableness and loathsomeness, or sweetness and nauseousness, is not just the same sort of knowledge with that, by which he knows what a triangle is and what a square is. The one is mere speculative knowledge; the other sensible knowledge, in which more than the mere intellect is concerned; the heart is the proper subject of it, or the soul as being that not only beholds, but has inclination and is pleased and displeased. And yet there is

*Subjects of Enquiry* (c1746-51) and *Sermon Notebook 45* (1738-56) were Edwards's primary regulatory notebooks. The brief notebook "Subjects of Enquiry" is a collection of "Things to be particularly enquired into and written upon." Matters of style and literary technique appear with frequency. It seems, on the whole, to be as much about the nature and method of effective expression as it is any particular topic or doctrine:

Concerning the mischief that is done through improper distinctions by reason of difference of words and names, supposing there be an answerable, proper, real and thorough distinction in things. Show this in particular concerning the divine attributes, and concerning the graces and virtues, the faculties and affections of the soul. (p.1). In reading the Epistles observe the references to the history of Christ. Facts needed by the evangelists. (p.16). Read the Book of Psalms, comparing them with Dr Watts' and Tate and Brady's versions and the sense they give of 'em. (p.18). Particularly to enquire concerning the things which make a history of past ages to be credible in a present age. (p.21). Read the Bible through and observe the images of divine things – how there used. (p.24).<sup>102</sup>

In other respects "Subjects of Enquiry" is a procedural checklist. It is the device by which Edwards regulated all the business of his study:

See the papers in my drawers containing the minutes of arguments to prove the truth of the Christian religion. (p.1). Write on two dispensations and take the hints from Mr Glass' notes on the scripture texts, num 3, pp15, 16, 18, 19, and 27. (p.12). To be writing my treatise concerning the human nature. (p.15). Make a table of names of authors we have an account of in history. (p.15). Draw up a more perfect table of the "Miscellanies". (p.15). Read the scriptures in the originals. (p.19). Read the scriptures, at least such parts as are most likely, in order to observe how the visible things of the creation are made use of as representations and types of spiritual things, that I may note them in my book about images of divine things. (p.19). Read the scriptures in order to make a dictionary showing the force of terms and phrases both in English and Hebrew. (p.19). Add another leaf at the beginning of my papers on faith and then complete the heads of things implied in faith with references. (p.20). Make tables of what I

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the nature of instruction in it; as he that has perceived the sweet taste of honey, knows much more about it, than he who has only looked upon and felt of it." Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, in *Jonathan Edwards Religious Affections*, Vol. 2, 272.

<sup>102</sup> Kimnach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, 68-70.

have written on several subjects, especially of such as I have written more largely upon – at least tables of the texts of scripture. (p.22). Make a table of what I have written concerning the evidences of the truth of the Christian religion. (p.23).

Edwards's habit was to write down every thought that entered his mind and revisit it in order to inspire further thoughts. Engulfed by family, parishioners, ministerial students and itinerants, not to mention life-threatening diseases and skirmishes between Colonial powers and local Indian tribes, Edwards needed to remind himself in his notebooks about things he should do in order to carry out his ministerial duties successfully. This intentionality in shaping his public ministry was becoming more and more characteristic of his career. Sermon Notebook 45 was probably begun in late 1738 or early 1739 and provides a fascinating "sermonic chronicle" of Edwards's final years at Northampton, the period of transition, and the years at Stockbridge. Many of the entries are notes on preaching duties rather than textual or thematic briefs for sermons:

Preach a sermon wherein I would direct souls in seeking salvation from the hints given in the story of Joseph. (p.9). To preach a sermon against robbing fruit trees and gardens, etc. before next fruit time if I should live. (p.13). Preach a sermon to children the Sabbath after next to stir 'em up to love the Lord Jesus Christ. (p.29). To choose some subject on purpose to show how unreasonable it is that persons should strive less in religion after conversion than before. (p.41). Reprove others for telling their judgments when they think others are converted. (p.53). Show under some text what will make a happy people. How religion would proceed in the right channel among them, and how happy and beautiful that would be. (p.85). Show very particularly how common people are led into a false, imaginary religion through the mistake of the terms that ministers use such as having the eyes opened seeing, etc.(p.115).<sup>103</sup>

For Edwards, a transitory thought had the capacity to turn into a treatise.

#### *(b) Public Perception*

Further evidence of Edwards's concern for his public profile can be seen in his attention to sermon delivery. Composing sermons was his strength but he was dissatisfied with his ability to deliver them. In 1727, he shifted from a larger octavo sermon booklet to a smaller duodecimo, probably so that the booklet would not be so obvious in his hand. Around 1730,

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 62-3.

he began the heavy use of “pick up lines,” visual devices that enabled him to pick up where he had left off, after looking up from his booklet, more easily than searching through his tiny writing. Edwards considered dependence upon his written text in the pulpit a serious failing.<sup>104</sup> Around 1740, he began abbreviating his syntax much more heavily.<sup>105</sup> Evidence appears in his manuscript sermons that he began to experiment with and perfect his own revival rhetoric in a Whitefieldian direction. He increasingly outlined his sermons in order to achieve the appearance of Whitefield’s extemporaneity.<sup>106</sup> He also began to include large white space breaks in his notes as a signal to extemporize. In place of fully written out sentences he began supplying simple but potent rhetorical cues: “You are warned by it” and “You are invited by it.”<sup>107</sup> Edwards’s preaching clearly indicates that his talents were those of a writer. He did not have the qualities of voice and gesture expected of the successful orator.<sup>108</sup> Besides altering the format of his manuscript notes, he shifted his content decisively from heaven to hell. From experience, he knew that the indispensable emotional appeal in an awakening sermon was fear, and even terror. In defence of revival preaching Edwards observed: “Tis no argument that a work is not from the Spirit of God, that it seems to be promoted by ministers insisting very much on the terrors of God’s holy law, and that with a great deal of pathos and earnestness.”<sup>109</sup> Increasingly, he projected himself by more effective strategies as a master of the art of preaching rather than an apprentice.

Edwards was fascinated by the mysterious power of words but he also recognized their limitations. For him, salvation is all of God and nothing of Jonathan Edwards. In his preface to *Five Discourses* he argues for plainness: “However unable I am to preach or write politely, if I would, yet I have this to comfort me under such a defect, that God has showed us he does not need such talents in men to carry on his own work, and that he has been pleased to smile upon and bless a very plain, unfashionable way of preaching.”<sup>110</sup> Edwards condemns wit and

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<sup>104</sup> Samuel Hopkins recalls that Edwards “look’d upon his using his Notes so much as he did, a Deficiency and Infirmary.” Samuel Hopkins, *Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): The Life and Character of the Late Reverend, Learned and Pious Mr. Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh & Boston: Alexander Jardine, 1799), 48.

<sup>105</sup> Wilson H. Kinnach, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1743-1758*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 25 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>106</sup> Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch and Kyle P. Farley, eds., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1739-1742*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 22 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 31.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>108</sup> Sereno E. Dwight, *The Works of President Edwards*, Vol. 1 (New York: Converse, 1830), 605-8.

<sup>109</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Faithful Narrative,” in *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 246.

<sup>110</sup> “Appendix A. Preface to Discourses on Various Important Subjects,” in *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1734-1738*, 797.

style out of hand as irrelevant to effective preaching, while also suggesting an incapacity for stylistic excellence on his own part.

The practical discourses that follow ... now appear in that very plain and unpolished dress in which they were first prepared and delivered; which was mostly at a time when the circumstances of the auditory they were preached to, were enough to make a minister neglect, forget, and despise such ornaments as politeness and modishness of style and method, when coming as a messenger from God to souls deeply impressed with a sense of their danger of God's everlasting wrath, to treat with them about eternal salvation. However unable I am to preach or write politely, if I would, yet I have this to comfort me under such a defect; that God has showed us that he don't need such talents in men to carry on his own work, and that he has been pleased to smile upon and bless a very plain unfashionable way of preaching. And have we not reason to think that it ever has been, and ever will be, God's manner to bless the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, let the elegance of language, and excellency of style, be carried to never so great a height, by the learning and wit of the present and future ages?<sup>111</sup>

Edwards was consciously developing a heart-piercing manner of writing. It did not strike him that the efficacious verbal expression for which he constantly strove and "style" might be the same thing. Thus he could spend much of his lifetime studying the theory and practice of language and metaphor without "paying any attention to style."<sup>112</sup> He would rather deny excellence than to be thought to be a creature of wit and style.<sup>113</sup>

(c) *Congregational Control in Covenant*

In the face of growing opposition to the awakening, Edwards's stance changed from that of conductor and chronicler to that of sympathetic critical analyst. At the peak of New England's revival season, dozens of people experienced ecstatic episodes of what was regarded as religious enthusiasm. This stirred up opposition to the movement. Boston's Charles Chauncy was doubtless the most learned – and most bitter – critic of the Revival;

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 798.

<sup>112</sup> Kimnach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, 24.

<sup>113</sup> Edwards's matured vision of the ideal preacher is most completely delineated in his ordination sermon on John 5:35, entitled *The True Excellency of a Minister of the Gospel* (1744). There he insists that the minister must be "both a burning and shining light"; that his heart burn with love to Christ, and fervent desires of the advancement of his kingdom and glory," and that "his instruction be clear and plain, accommodated to the capacity of his audience, and tending to convey light to their understandings." Ibid., 25.

more than once he taunted New Lights with the French Prophets when he was not likening them to Mrs. Hutchinson and the Antinomians or the Quakers.<sup>114</sup> Deacon Moses Lyman, a veteran of the astonishing Northampton revival of 1734-35, viewed the manifestations of the current awakening as extreme by comparison and asked Edwards for his views on the excesses stirred up by itinerants.<sup>115</sup> Writing to Moses Lyman just a few short weeks after his visit to Enfield, Edwards hinted that the work that he had witnessed in the upper Valley exhibited “mixtures of natural affection ... and some imprudences and irregularities.”<sup>116</sup> Although he disagreed with extremists, he was not about to disown the movement he had done so much to foster. As an advocate of Whitefield’s, Edwards felt obligated to uphold the principle of itinerancy. In a second letter on May 10, 1742, Edwards took the time to respond to the former parishioner’s concerns about lay exhorting and the sharing of experiences by new converts.<sup>117</sup> The clergy generally opposed lay exhorting because it further encroached on their positions and prerogatives, but defenders of the revivals welcomed their activities. To avoid anarchy, Edwards took a middle of the road position and supported the ministerial view but encouraged lay members to participate on a personal, private basis.<sup>118</sup>

Ultimately Edwards was forced to publicly confront the very forms of religious enthusiasm that he had helped to unleash. The revival he had so desperately sought had come but the results were not what he had anticipated. In the light of his early radicalism, Edwards spent the next several years moderating his position. Under the preaching of Samuel Buell, in 1742, Northampton exhibited signs of religious enthusiasm while Edwards was away on a preaching tour. His wife Sarah experienced many of the excesses of the revival. The ministerial persona he had adopted left no room for spontaneous uncontrolled public euphoria. Though he initially embraced the ecstatic manifestations of Buell’s ministry in his congregation, a letter of December 1743, which he had published by Thomas Prince Jr. in *The Christian History*, tells a very different story. This letter bemoans the fact that, with “people” raised to great heights of religious ecstasy, “Satan took the advantage” and catapulted the Northampton congregation into enthusiasm and error. It took a “great deal of caution and pains,” he explained to Prince’s transatlantic reading audience, to keep his

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<sup>114</sup> Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (Boston, 1743), 374-5.

<sup>115</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 228.

<sup>116</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Deacon Moses Lyman,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 96-8.

<sup>117</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Rev. William McCullough,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 101-2.

<sup>118</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Deacon Moses Lyman,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 101-3.



congregation “from running wild.”<sup>119</sup> Edwards’s letter betrays a growing uneasiness with emotional excesses and stands as his final public statement, specifically on the events of the revival at its peak.<sup>120</sup> Edwards included in the letter a copy of the *Covenant* he devised to recover a sense of order among his parishioners and to institute the conditions and spirit needed for further revival.<sup>121</sup> He declared a day of fasting, prayer, and owning the covenant for Tuesday, March 16, 1742. The whole congregation assembled in the meeting house and, in a solemn ceremony, all the people over fourteen years of age assented to the document.<sup>122</sup>

In the preamble to the Northampton Covenant, Edwards acknowledged “God’s great goodness to us, a sinful unworthy people, in the blessed manifestations and fruits of his gracious presence in this town ... particularly in the very late spiritual revival,” lamented the “past backslidings and ungrateful departing from God” by the townspeople, and requested that God would “not mark our iniquities, but for Christ’s sake come over the mountains of our sins, and visit us with his salvation; and continue the tokens of his presence with us; and yet more gloriously pour out his blessed Spirit upon us ....”<sup>123</sup> This was followed by:

We do this day present ourselves before the Lord, to renounce our evil ways, and put away our abominations from before God’s eyes, and with one accord to renew our engagements to seek and serve God, and particularly do now solemnly promise and vow to the Lord as follows: We will have a strict regard to rules of honesty, justice and uprightness; ... we will endeavour to render to everyone his due; ... we will not rest till we make restitution; ... we will not allow ourselves in backbiting; ... we will avoid doing anything to our neighbour from a spirit of revenge; ... we will not make our own worldly gain, or honor, our governing aim; ... we will not tolerate the exercise of enmity and ill will, or revenge in our hearts against any of our neighbours. We will strictly avoid all freedoms and familiarities in company, so tending to stir up or gratify a lust of lasciviousness and we now appear before God, depending on divine grace and assistance,

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<sup>119</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend Thomas Prince,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 120-1.

<sup>120</sup> One of Chauncy’s disciples, still imbued with the “thoughts” terminology of polemic, published a bitter attack on this letter in an unsigned article, “Some Serious Thoughts of the Late Times,” in the *Boston Evening Post* January 30, 1744. Cited in Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 86 n2.

<sup>121</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Copy of a Covenant Entered into and Subscribed by the People of God at Northampton ... March 16, 1741/42,” in “Letter to the Reverend Thomas Prince,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 121.

<sup>122</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 260-1.

<sup>123</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend Thomas Prince,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 121.

solemnly to devote our whole lives to be labouriously spent in the business of religion.<sup>124</sup>

The great majority of covenant rules focused on being a good neighbour. If the congregation adopted the covenant wholeheartedly, Edwards believed he would have the conditions he needed to extend the revival, while endowing it with greater credibility and respectability by virtue of its increased decorum and sense of propriety.

## V CONTROL ACHIEVED

That Edwards sought to establish some control over the chaos of revivalist excesses is clear, but the degree to which he achieved that control is not so settled. If his aim was to reconcile proponents and opponents of revival, then his role as mediator was of limited effect. However, if the aim was to articulate a balanced statement of revival within control, then his role as mouthpiece of such a concept is long-lasting. That is, politically, he fell short; philosophically, he prevailed.

Edwards's *Covenant* was both a remarkable constitution for a model town and a mirror image of his own beliefs and practices that the Northampton parishioners found, in a very short space of time, that they could not keep. According to Edwards:

The work ... was infected from abroad; our people hearing, and some of them seeing the work in other places, where there was a greater visible commotion than here, and the outward appearances were more extraordinary; were ready to think that the work in those places far excelled what was amongst us; and their eyes were dazzled with the high profession and great show that some made who came hither from other places.<sup>125</sup>

These people from abroad, according to Edwards:

Went so far beyond them in raptures and violent emotions of the affection, and a vehement zeal, and what they called boldness for Christ, our people were ready to think was owing to their far greater attainments in grace, and intimacy with

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<sup>124</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "A Copy of a Covenant Entered into and Subscribed by the People of god at Northampton, and Owned before God in His House As their Vow to the Lord, and Made a Solemn Act of Public worship, by the Congregation in general That were Above Fourteen Years of Age, on a Day of Fasting and Prayer for the Continuance and Increase of the Gracious Presence of God in that Place, March 16, 1741/2," in "Letter to the Reverend Thomas Prince," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 122-5.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

heaven; they looked little in their own eyes in comparison of them, and were ready to submit themselves up to their conduct.<sup>126</sup>

For Edwards, the emotional phenomena were primarily peripheral; for his congregation they were everything and this, according to Edwards, “gave many of them a deep and unhappy tincture,” when they could not attain the euphoric heights of ecstasy that other congregations were experiencing.<sup>127</sup>

(a) *Open Warfare*

By the 1740s, Yale College at New Haven had become the centre for some of the hottest agitation over the revival and some students at Yale were nearing a state of rebellion.<sup>128</sup> Awakened students followed the lead of the itinerants and were attacking their elders. They condemned many of the clergy and declared Yale and its faculty spiritually dead.<sup>129</sup> In 1741, Edwards arrived at Yale in the midst of the commotion keenly conscious of the divisions caused by the Awakening. His topic was entitled *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God, Applied to That Uncommon Operation That Has lately Appeared on the Minds of Many of the People of the Land: With a Particular Consideration of the Extraordinary Circumstances with which This Work is Attended*.<sup>130</sup> After a brief examination of his text, 1 John 4:1, Edwards turned his attention to disarming those who would discredit the revival on the basis of its epiphenomena.<sup>131</sup> Ingenuously admitting nine major flaws in the behaviour of the newly awakened, he went on to enumerate five “sure distinguishing, Scripture evidences”<sup>132</sup> of a genuine work of God. Edwards endeavoured to be a moderating influence but his ringing endorsement of the awakening in the “Application” of his address, and his suggestion that opposing the awakening might be “the unpardonable sin,” or “the sin against the Holy Spirit” mentioned in Matthew 12:22-32,<sup>133</sup> forced the opposition into the open and marked the beginning of polarization in attitudes towards the revival. New England’s clerical establishment became permanently divided between New Light awakeners and Old Light

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>128</sup> The agitations at Yale began when Whitefield had preached at Yale the previous fall. He found the College spiritually torpid and preached on “the dreadful ill consequences of an unconverted ministry.” Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 210-11.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>130</sup> We do not have the exact sermon Edwards preached at Yale but rather a version “with great enlargements” published soon after in Boston. Benjamin Franklin also published an edition in Philadelphia the next year and Isaac Watts oversaw a London edition. John Wesley published an abridgement which, like the original, went through several editions. Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 53n.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 54

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 55.

critics.<sup>134</sup> William Cooper, Benjamin Colman's colleague at Brattle Street, wrote the preface for the published version of Edwards's Yale sermon. In it he stated that Old Light opposers were acting from ignorance, jealousy, prejudice, or – *extremitas erroris* – Arminianism.<sup>135</sup>

In the spring of 1742, Edwards was still immensely optimistic about the future of the awakening and was devoting most of his intellectual energies to writing a much longer defence of the revival. Appearing the next spring as a 378 page treatise, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England: And the Way in which It Ought to be Acknowledged and Promoted* (1743), it reveals Edwards at the height of his exhilaration over the awakening. In it he endeavoured to vindicate the revival and confute its critics. Rationalistic objections to the revival, he asserted, rested on a false philosophy that divorced "the affections of the soul" from the will.<sup>136</sup> Old Lights espoused the classical view that "passions" are sub-rational appetites to be held in check by reason. According to Chauncy, "an enlightened mind and not raised affections ought always to be the guide of those who call themselves men; and this in the affairs of religion as well as other things."<sup>137</sup> For Edwards, "the things of religion take place in men's hearts. The informing of the understanding is all vain, any farther than it affects the heart; or which is the same thing, has influence on the affections."<sup>138</sup> Edwards held firmly that the dynamic centre of a willing, acting, personal being lies not in the intellect but in the disposition. *Some Thoughts* proceeds directly from Edwards's own new sense of the heart.<sup>139</sup>

In *Some Thoughts*, Edwards defended the Awakening, but "Part IV, Shewing What Things Are to be Corrected or Avoided in Promoting This work, or in our Behaviour Under It," is an extended catalogue of the errors that he had witnessed in parishes throughout the region.<sup>140</sup> He condemned the excessive zeal of both pro-revival ministers and their lay adherents – spiritual pride and erroneous principles that fuelled their bold claims of immediate revelations, absolute promises of divine election, uncharitable practice of judging the spiritual experiences of others, and special calls to preach and exhort.<sup>141</sup> If Edwards had hoped to dampen the enemy's powder by his frank acknowledgments of the revival's excesses, he was

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<sup>134</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 238.

<sup>135</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 59.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>137</sup> Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*, 327.

<sup>138</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 66.

<sup>139</sup> Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 792-3.

<sup>140</sup> Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England," 409.

<sup>141</sup> Winiarski, "Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley," 730.

disappointed. Comments printed in the *Boston Evening Post* read, “The fourth part of Mr. Edwards’s late book ... contains an account of greater disorders, delusions, errors and extravagances among the subjects of the late work, than the opposers thought of, or could have believed on any lower authority.”<sup>142</sup>

Charles Chauncy, junior pastor to Thomas Foxcroft at First Church (nicknamed Old Brick), saw the excesses as overwhelming any good that the revival might have done. He argued that such extremes could result only in damage to true religion and irreparable damage to the standing order.<sup>143</sup> By 1742, he was deeply alarmed as a result of the excesses stirred up by itinerants Whitefield, Tennent, Davenport, Wheelock, Buell and Pomeroy.<sup>144</sup> He wrote to his brother announcing the publication of Edwards’s *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival of Religion in New England*:

Mr. Edwards’s book ... upon the good work is at last come forth , and I believe will do much hurt; and I am the rather inclined to think so, because there are some good things in it.... Error is much more likely to be propagated when it is mixed with truth. This hides its deformity and makes it go down more easily.<sup>145</sup>

As the self-appointed guardian of orthodoxy, Chauncy took it upon himself to expose to the world the particular “deformity” which lurked in Edwards’s insidious book.<sup>146</sup> Six months after the appearance of *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, Chauncy published his answer to Edwards under the title *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*. Mimicking not only the name but the five-part structure of *Some Thoughts*, Chauncy undertook to refute Edwards’s argument point by point.<sup>147</sup>

On March 24 and March 31, the *Boston News Letter* advertised Edwards’s *Some Thoughts* as “Just Published,” and immediately below was the prospectus for Chauncy’s forthcoming *Seasonable Thoughts*. This juxtaposition of the two title pages with their respective tables of

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<sup>142</sup> *Boston Evening Post*. June 13, 1743. Cited in Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 80.

<sup>143</sup> Edward Griffin, *Old Brick: Charles Chauncy of Boston, 1705-1787* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 59-63.

<sup>144</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 269.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Edwin S. Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: P. S. Smith Publishing, 1957), 90.

<sup>146</sup> Amy Schrager Lang, “‘A Flood of Errors’: Chauncy and Edwards in the Great Awakening,” in Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout, eds., *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 160.

<sup>147</sup> The backdrop against which Edwards developed his ideas on affections is provided by the prevailing views of passions and enthusiasm in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Susan James, “The Passions in Metaphysics and the Theory of Action,” in Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, eds., *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 913.

contents was “hardly coincidental.”<sup>148</sup> *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* was a fully-fledged attack on Jonathan Edwards and the Awakening. “A religion whose substance is merely passion,” warned Chauncy, “finds itself vulnerable to the wildest temptations, chiefly fancy and enthusiasm.”<sup>149</sup> The effects of divine truth upon the soul should be reasonable “Solicitude,” not the loose shenanigans of New Lights. Chauncy was the Old Lights’ rational man and his book was a careful exposure of the Great Awakening to the light of reason. In addition to its criticisms, Chauncy’s volume was a splendid explanation of what the revivalists were rebelling against.<sup>150</sup>

Edwards’s yearning for revival was unabated. He hoped for an imminent reviving of the revival on an even grander scale, but soon after *Some Thoughts* was published, the polarities of New England’s religious situation became much sharper. In May 1743, the traditional post-Election Day meeting of ministers developed into a rump session dominated by Old Lights, who promptly seized the occasion to pass a resolution condemning the revival *in toto* without conceding a shred of integrity to any part of it.<sup>151</sup> Charles Chauncy affixed a presumptuous title to the action and had it printed as:

*The testimony of the Pastors of the Churches in the Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, at Their Annual Convention in Boston May 25; 1743. Against Several Errors in Doctrine and Disorders in Practice, Which have of Late Obtained in various Parts of the Land; as Drawn up by a Committee Chosen by the Said Pastors, Read and accepted Paragraph by Paragraph, and Voted to Be Signed by the Moderator in Their Name and Printed.*<sup>152</sup>

Only seventy of the more than 200 Massachusetts ministers had been present, with only thirty-eight voting for the resolution. Stung by this brazen attempt to posture the clergy as massively opposed to the revival, New Lights promptly called a special convocation to meet the day after Commencement and bear a positive witness, which they published as:

*The Testimony and Advice of an Assembly of Pastors of Churches in New England, at a Meeting in Boston July 7, 1743. Occasioned by the Late Happy Revival of Religion in Many Parts of the Land. To Which Are Added Attestations*

<sup>148</sup> Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England*, 93.

<sup>149</sup> Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*, 422.

<sup>150</sup> David S. Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World: Heresy to Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 189.

<sup>151</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 79.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

*Contained in Letters from a Number of their Brethren Who Were Providentially  
Hindered from Giving Their Presence.*

This was signed by sixty-eight ministers and supported by letters of approval from forty-three others. Such developments marked the crystallizing of pro- and anti- revival factors into two irreconcilable parties.<sup>153</sup> Edwards's thoughts had been lobbed into a no-man's land between "two opposing armies."<sup>154</sup> New England clerical establishment and its people were now deeply divided. Proponents of the Awakening found themselves on the defensive for several years. Tennent and Davenport shifted courses to preserve the purity of the movement. Friends had convinced them that the Awakening suffered seriously from extremism. By 1744, both Tennent and Davenport had confessed their "misguided zeal."<sup>155</sup> Even Whitefield conceded that there had been some wildfire in his zeal, that he had written and spoken from his own spirit too much, when at the time he had thought he was "writing and speaking entirely by the Assistance of the Spirit of God."<sup>156</sup>

As the Awakening declined, Edwards wrote to two of his correspondents in Scotland, the Reverend James Robe and the Reverend William McCulloch on May 12, 1743. He shared his convictions that the American awakening was flawed: talk without action, polarization, and emotion for its own sake. The root cause for the problems, he believed, was a lack of ministerial leadership.<sup>157</sup> "The clouds have lately thickened ... there is a great decay of the work of God amongst us, especially as to the awakening and converting influence of the Spirit of God. The people are divided into two parties, those that favour the work and those that are against it."<sup>158</sup> Edwards acknowledged a litany of errors that had led to the decline of the awakening. His burden was not anger toward critics and opposers but sorrow over the strife which had dissipated the awakening. He candidly attributed all blame to "imprudent management in the friends of the work" and confessed that revivalist ministers had failed to take sufficient caution for preventing errors and disorders and had been too careless in their

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<sup>153</sup> For a summary account, with convenient references to most of the major sources, see Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England*, 63-79. Among the 43 absentees sending letters was Jonathan Edwards, who joined six other ministers of Hampshire County in signing a brief testimony dated June 30, 1743; it was printed in *The Christian History* 1, 178-80. See also Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 542-3.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>155</sup> *The Boston Evening Post*, July 26, 1742. "The Reverend Mr. James Davenport's Confession & Retraction. Boston: 1744," in Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, eds., *Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences*, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Publishing, 1967), 257-62.

<sup>156</sup> George Whitefield, *Some Remarks on a Pamphlet Intituled the Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar'd* (Boston [New England] 1749), 24-25. Cited in David S. Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World: Heresy to Revolution*, 269 n51.

<sup>157</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Rev. William McCulloch," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 105-7.

<sup>158</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Rev. James Robe," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 108.

pastoral counselling of the awakened. His tone in this letter is not polemical or hortatory, but confessional.<sup>159</sup> Edwards again wrote to McCulloch on March 5, 1744, setting out his view of history at length, and confessing in the most dismal terms yet the “sad delusions” which had permitted “the enemy to come in like a flood, so that the work is put to a stop everywhere.” Despite this, he held out hope that there would yet be another great revival of religion in New England.<sup>160</sup>

Looking back, Edwards was able to reflect with some satisfaction on his own part in spreading the revival via his network of correspondents. Implicit in his recollection is a sense of the processes and stages by which information moved outward: first, “by taking great pains to communicate to others” and then, equal pains “to extract from all letters” received. He went on to make the contents of this correspondence public by readings to his congregation “and also to the association of ministers .... and occasionally to many others.” This did not exhaust his efforts, as he copied sections of letters and sent them to other parts of Massachusetts and to Connecticut with advice to the recipient that he too should “communicate it to other ministers and ... to his people.”<sup>161</sup>

#### (b) *Religious Affections*

The awakenings set the stage for what is regarded as Edwards’s definitive statement on revivalism, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746). The awakening raised many questions that needed to be answered with clarity and resolve. The perennial problem of discerning the difference between the presence of God the Holy Spirit and the emotional excesses of people provided Edwards with perhaps his greatest challenge. How could the presence of the Divine Spirit be determined is the question that Edwards chose to answer in *Religious Affections*. For Edwards, “truly gracious and holy affections” are essential, but the existence of what he regarded as false affections forced him to set out criteria for testing them. Before describing the twelve signs of gracious affections, he turned to the idea of negative signs, all of which he had witnessed during the Awakening:

It is no sign that affections have great effects on the body.... It is no sign that affections cause those who have them to be fluent, fervent and abundant, in talking of the things of religion.... It is no sign that affections come with texts of

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<sup>159</sup> Goen, *Jonathan Edwards The Great Awakening*, 84.

<sup>160</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Rev. William McCullough,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 134-43.

<sup>161</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Rev. William McCullough,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 272.



Scripture, remarkably brought to the mind.... And it is no sign that people have affections of many kinds.<sup>162</sup>

Edwards also attempted to describe false experiences:

These consist of instances when a person is affected with a lively idea, suddenly excited in his mind, of some shape; or very beautiful pleasant form of countenance, or some shining light, or other glorious appearance; ... strong ideas of shapes and colours, and outward brightness and glory, or sounds and voices.

These arise from impressions on the imagination.<sup>163</sup>

These lists of negative signs and false experiences add further weight to the notion that Edwards himself never experienced the euphoric excesses of the Awakening. While his many writings reveal he could not deny the validity of his own experiences, rightly or wrongly, he could deny the experiences of others.

For Edwards, “holy gracious affections” could only arise from the perception of the person of God via the God given spiritual sense.<sup>164</sup> Edwards’s list of positive signs is an extrapolation of his own experiences recorded in his *Personal Narrative*.<sup>165</sup> As always, he used his own experience to authenticate “true heart religion.” He outlined twelve positive signs of genuine affections. Gracious affections are genuine only when they are initiated by influences that are “spiritual, supernatural and divine.” Gracious affections are caused by God the Holy Spirit.<sup>166</sup> Love is the paramount affection in Edwards’s view and it has a dual role. “The essence of all true religion lies in holy love” and “love is ... one of the affections ... and the fountain of all the affections.”<sup>167</sup> His third sign focused on the “amiableness of God” and the “loveliness of the moral excellence of divine things.” The true believer loves the beauty which is located in God.<sup>168</sup> The fourth sign focuses on what Edwards called spiritual understanding and shows how it is related to the rise of affections. All genuine affections are

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<sup>162</sup> Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, 131-47.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-11.

<sup>164</sup> Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” 801.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 790-804.

<sup>166</sup> Edwards’s basic insight and most important and original idea in *Religious Affections* is that there is in the redeemed a new inward perception, a new simple idea – the spiritual sense – which is a new creation that the natural person does not have: This new spiritual sense is not a new faculty of understanding, but it is a new foundation laid in the nature of the soul, of a new kind of exercise of the same faculty of understanding. So that new holy disposition of heart that attends this new sense, is not a new faculty of will, but a foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of will. Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, 206.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>168</sup> The spiritual sense of which Edwards spoke is the channel for apprehension of this beauty. It is more than an awareness of God; it is a sense of a “taste” of the divine glory and its beauty; “this kind of beauty is the quality that is the immediate object of the spiritual sense.” *Ibid.*, 253-6.

intimately connected with an understanding of the intrinsic nature of what we are responding to in being affected: “Holy affections are not heat without light, but evermore arise from some information of the understanding; some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge.”<sup>169</sup>

Edwards’s fifth sign emphasizes the sense of the truth of religion that stems from the apprehension of the excellency of God.<sup>170</sup> Conviction for Edwards is a direct sense “that it is so.” The sixth sign is the affection of humility which stems from “a sense of the majesty and awesomeness of God.” There must be a voluntary acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty and moral excellency which signals a change in inclination of the self as a whole.<sup>171</sup> His seventh sign focused on the change of nature involved in the new orientation – a turn to God and away from the corruption of the world.<sup>172</sup> The eighth and ninth signs have to do with the moral dimension of religious faith. He described Christ-like character in terms of love, meekness and quietness of spirit.<sup>173</sup> Gracious affections, he said, differ from false in having beautiful symmetry and proportion. As a standard for judgment, Edwards cited the “whole image of Christ that is upon the new man; there is every grace in him which is in Christ.”<sup>174</sup> In this and the eleventh sign the emphasis fell on enduring patterns of life manifest over a long period of time.<sup>175</sup> “The more persons have of holy affections, the more they have of that spiritual taste which I have spoken of elsewhere; whereby they perceive the excellency, and relish the divine sweetness of holiness.”<sup>176</sup> Holy practice is the chief sign of gracious affections. Holy practice is a “business” which a person “is chiefly engaged in;” a business which the person persists in until the end of their life. It is “not the business of a month, or a year, or of seven years, but a lifelong business.”<sup>177</sup>

## VI CONCLUSION

*Religious Affections* is perhaps Edwards’s most original contribution to religious thought. It was directed at both the extreme New Lights who had led many people into self delusion and Old Lights who believed that affections were related to the inferior animal passions. Chauncy

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 446.

had written Edwards off as a “visionary enthusiast, and not to be minded in anything he says,” so he ignored it. *Religious Affections* became, nevertheless, one of the most widely read treatises and it remains one of America’s most profound inquiries into the nature of religious experience.<sup>178</sup> Edwards’s family have good reason to think that perhaps no person ever lived who so habitually and carefully committed his thoughts, on almost every subject, to writing. “His ordinary studies were pursued pen in hand, and with his notebooks before him; and he not only often stopped in his daily rides by the wayside, but frequently rose even at midnight to commit to paper any important thought that had occurred to him.”<sup>179</sup>

Jonathan Edwards documented and defended the awakenings through his writings. His message and style reveal a complex man behind the words; hotly engaged yet cool headed, speculative and experimental yet dogmatic in essentials; learned and metaphysical yet most practical; mystical and yet shrewd; plain speaking yet artful.<sup>180</sup> Revivals were Edwards’s life; revivals were the focal point of his ministry. No revival meant no evidence of God’s activity in drawing human history to its culmination. As well as shaping the religious landscape in America, revivals also played a key role in fashioning Edwards. He adopted multiple roles in orchestrating, directing and controlling the movement. His ministerial persona with its duties and responsibilities dictated his participation. He progressively disciplined himself in his letters and, particularly, his sermons, to project a greater sense of reputable credibility as a means of gaining more control over proponents and opponents of the revivals. At the same time, he constantly strove to cultivate the conditions in his congregation that would invoke a new revival. The chaos of the excesses that divided the ecclesiastical establishment during the 1740-43 awakening did not deter him from his commitment to revivalism or dull his positive portrayal of their worth as an extraordinary manifestation of God’s providence to his church. It is in his mature writings on balance in revival that can be seen the maturation of Edwards’s persona as both agent and product of the management of chaos.

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<sup>178</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 303.

<sup>179</sup> Tyron Edwards, “Introduction to Charity and Its Fruits,” in *Jonathan Edwards Ethical Writings*, 125-8.

<sup>180</sup> Kinnach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, 131.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ONE MAN’S AUTHORITY IS ANOTHER MAN’S ALIEN**

#### **I INTRODUCTION**

At his conversion experience, Edwards appropriated a new concept of divine sovereignty which gave him the theological ground on which he would base all ensuing thought and action, the authoritative foundation on which he would establish his persona. He then engaged in various activities, in particular his literary contests with philosophical and religious systems and his apologetic enterprise as a credible spokesperson for revivals. These contests with opposing forces were the formative elements which shaped the public face of Edwards, as he grew in stature as an ecclesial leader at both international and national levels. We turn now to his later years, when he waged war on a different front, the local arena of Northampton, a tangible and specific conflict which was to prove climactic in the consolidation and mature expression of his persona. The previously defensive apologetic writer who conducted literary campaigns in a somewhat depersonalized way now emerged as an aggressive combatant in direct conflict with individuals in his own church. The issues he had previously confronted now became actual persons with whom he endeavoured to establish his personal authority in an adversarial way. This would lead him not only to stand at a distance from his people in order to impose his authority, but also to a position where he would become alienated from those same people.

The catalyst for the Northampton conflict was Edwards’s stand on the “Halfway Covenant.” While other factors of personal inter-relations were no doubt involved, it was Edwards’s claim to authority to determine the integrity of church membership that was to put him irretrievably off-side with his congregation. This chapter will give first the necessary introduction to the development and issues in the Halfway Covenant and from there will analyse the ensuing conflict, which will demonstrate how the fully developed persona of Edwards the self-assured authoritative and combative ecclesial leader was clearly manifest.

#### **II THE HALFWAY COVENANT: A CRISIS OF PRAGMATICS**

Ensuring the piety of participants in the Lord’s Supper had long been seen as a safeguard of the spiritual integrity of a church. The question of “who is qualified to take communion” did not originate with either Stoddard or Edwards. The apostle Paul addressed this question in 1 Corinthians 11 when he said that those partaking of the bread and wine ought to “examine

themselves” and to “discern the Lord’s body” so as not to eat and drink “in an unworthy manner.” Sixteenth-century Reformers made the point that the Lord’s Supper was only for persons who engaged in stringent self-examination and repentance for sin. No one could come to the Lord’s Supper who was spiritually unclean, in the light of 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.<sup>1</sup> The English reformers derived their vision of the church not only from scripture but also from Martin Bucer, John Calvin and other leaders of the Rhineland Reformation. Citing these verses time and again, English writers echoed the great reformers. From the very outset of the Puritan movement in England, its leaders struggled to transform the state church into such a body and these ideals were continued by the pilgrim fathers who arrived in the North American Colony in the early seventeenth century. In striving to create pure churches, Puritans sought to make the “visible” church of Christ conform as closely as possible to the “invisible” church of God’s elect.<sup>2</sup>

By 1649, the central tenets of New England Congregationalism - the New England Way - were complete and codified in the Cambridge Platform. The Cambridge Platform, written largely by Dorchester pastor Richard Mather, offered a detailed description of and biblical justification for the practices and government of New England churches. Central was the desire to create churches that were both “pure” in membership and powerful in directing the outward governance of the New England towns. This meant that before joining a church, prospective members had to testify to a work of divine grace in their lives. Only then could they seek membership in the local church. These “narratives of grace,” as they came to be known, were seen as necessary to ascertain that the candidate for communion and church membership had been truly regenerated and that the grace of God was genuinely present in his or her heart and life. Puritans established their churches as the law of the land much like the Church of England in Old England. Inhabitants either conformed to their authority and teaching or they were banished.<sup>3</sup> Under the preaching and influence of John Cotton, this requirement of a narrative of grace became common in Massachusetts and Plymouth and was

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<sup>1</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord, in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread, and drink and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. Harold Lindsell, ed., *Harper Study Bible, The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1971), 1712.

<sup>2</sup> David D. Hall, ed., “Editor’s Introduction,” *Jonathan Edwards Ecclesiastical Writings, The Works of Jonathan Edwards* Vol. 12 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 18-23.

<sup>3</sup> Local and provincial government existed explicitly to uphold the local churches through mandatory taxes and legislation derived from Puritan readings of scripture. Thus the government could and did enact laws making church attendance compulsory and establishing civil penalties for such crimes as idolatry, blasphemy, heresy, profanity or contempt of religious authority. H. S. Stout, “New England Way,” in Daniel G. Reid et al *Dictionary of Christianity in America*. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 812-13.

strongly embraced in the New Haven colony, though rejected by Thomas Hooker in Connecticut.<sup>4</sup>

Associated with this demand for overtly regenerate membership was the rider that only “full” church members were allowed to present their children for baptism. Within a few years, however, the churches faced an unforeseen corollary to the question of baptism. What was the status of a child whose parents had been baptized in infancy but had never experienced conversion upon attaining adulthood? Did the children of baptized but unregenerate parents retain a right to baptism? Nearly all the ministers assembled at the Cambridge Synods of 1646-1649 agreed on the need to extend baptism to this group, but a minority of dissenters prevented the elders from adding the provision to the Cambridge Platform of church government. With each passing year, the issue became more acute as increasing numbers of baptized but unregenerate parents came before their churches and, citing the minister’s own justifications and conclusions, demanded baptism for their newborns. The ministers recognized that they would have to make another attempt to alter church procedures. In 1656, seventeen clergymen assembled in Boston to debate the Issue. Their conclusion, *A Disputation concerning Church Members and their Children in answer to XXI Questions*, published in London in 1659 and commended to the churches by the General Court, contained a full endorsement of what opponents later derisively labelled the “Halfway Covenant.”

Under its provision, the “Halfway Covenant” allowed unregenerate children of regenerate parents to baptize their offspring, providing they led an upright life and agreed to own the church covenant before the assembled congregation. As adults, all half-way members assumed the responsibilities of mutual watchfulness incumbent upon those engaged in the church covenant, but did not enjoy the privileges of voting or participation in the Lord’s Supper unless they experienced conversion and became “full members.” This measure brought the children under church discipline without corrupting church purity. These same principles were reaffirmed in a much larger assembly of ministers and lay delegates which convened in Boston at the “Halfway Synod” of 1662.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Alan D. Strange, “Jonathan Edwards on Visible Sainthood: the Communion Controversy,” *Mid-American Journal of Theology* 14 (2003): 107.

<sup>5</sup> Despite these ministerial pronouncements, lay opposition initially prevented most churches from implementing the Halfway Covenant. A small but influential group of clergymen, led by New Haven pastor John Davenport, pointed out that for decades ministers had warned churchgoers to avoid sinful “innovations” in church practice

Complicating the religious scene in New England was the Massachusetts Bay Colony ruling that only those who had joined the church covenant via full membership could enter the civil covenant and have the right to hold public office and vote. While this was not a problem for the “first generation,” successive generations did not seem to experience the sort of crisis-conversions that those of the first generation had done. Many did not profess to possess true saving grace or were unable to convince those already in the church covenant that they did.<sup>6</sup> Fewer and fewer were able to meet the exacting standards for communicant membership and were thus civilly disenfranchised. The framers of the Cambridge Platform had not been willing to accommodate the method of admittance to the Lord’s Table to political exigencies, but lurking in the background was the fear that if such dire circumstances continued to prevail, the covenant society, the civil covenant in particular, would wither away.<sup>7</sup> As fewer people were qualified to give acceptable narratives of grace, a crisis developed when many of the children of the first generation failed to become communicants themselves and so were not allowed to have their children baptized. This meant that baptism was being withheld from the grandchildren of full church members, for their parents had not become full church members. Church leaders searched for ways of restoring a broader, more inclusive membership even as they continued to defend the principles of Congregationalism.<sup>8</sup>

Those who came to the Synod of 1662 were determined to address the question concerning the unbaptised third generation.<sup>9</sup> They decided that the third generation could be baptized despite the fact that their parents (the second generation) were unable to give a narrative of grace.<sup>10</sup> What the synod required of the second generation was twofold: they must acknowledge the tenets of the Christian faith to be true and they must be moral in their lives. This synod came derisively to be tagged the “Halfway Synod.” The second generation as Half-way members (baptized yet not communing) could remain within the church and bring their children into the church by baptism.<sup>11</sup> This doctrinal downgrade did not solve the

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and to adhere to the letter of the Cambridge Platform. Eventually, nearly every church in New England adopted the Half-way Covenant. J. F. Cooper, “Half-way Covenant,” in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, 505-6.

<sup>6</sup> Strange, “Jonathan Edwards on Visible Sainthood: the Communion Controversy,” 110.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-12.

<sup>8</sup> Hall, “Editor’s Introduction,” 21.

<sup>9</sup> Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), 238-9.

<sup>10</sup> Some, including Jonathan Mitchel, Richard Mather, Thomas Shepard (1605-49) and his son Thomas Shepard II (1635-77), reasoned that the scope of baptism under the New Testament duplicated the scope of circumcision under the Old. According to their reading of the Old Testament, an entire nation participated in the covenant even though “many of them were not sincerely godly” or “were never of the invisible church.” *Ibid.*, 306, 316, 319, 329.

<sup>11</sup> Strange, “Jonathan Edwards on Visible Sainthood: the Communion Controversy,” 112-13.

ongoing problem of increasing numbers of persons remaining unqualified for citizenship. Pressure continued to mount on ecclesiastical authorities to lessen the requirements for full church membership so that civil, or social, covenant would remain viable. The churches pragmatically needed to lessen communion qualifications so that the idea of a covenant society and the centrality of the civil covenant, even as enunciated from the very beginning by John Winthrop, could be salvaged.<sup>12</sup>

In response to Baptists who rejected the typological fusion of Old and New Testaments, the clergy turned increasingly to another argument, that children of the church, although members only in external covenant, were more likely to be saved than if they remained unbaptised. To exclude them was to hasten degeneracy. To include them was to make use of the church as a “school” or “garden” in which they were nurtured.<sup>13</sup> The ideal of purity was transposed to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The “seed” of the covenant could receive baptism and be subject to church discipline but the only persons admitted to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper were members in “full communion,” or those who qualified in the old way. It was this sacrament that was ostensibly the issue in the Northampton controversy.<sup>14</sup>

Solomon Stoddard, Edwards’s grandfather, was the principal advocate in New England for a broadly inclusive definition of church membership. Some time after 1679, Stoddard eliminated the requirement of a narrative of grace in order to qualify to partake of communion in the Northampton congregation. He admitted to the Lord’s table all those who affirmed the truth of the faith and appeared “morally sincere.”<sup>15</sup> Stoddard argued that the sacrament of “holy communion” was a “converting ordinance.” Just as he invited all of Northampton to hear the preaching of the word so that they might be converted, he likewise reasoned that all should be invited to come to the Table, for the grace signified and sealed in

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<sup>12</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1958), 84-100.

<sup>13</sup> Hall, “Editor’s Introduction,” 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> The conflicts over the Half-way Covenant put Stoddard at odds with the Boston clergy, and the Mather family in particular, when he baptized the children of church members who had no personal conversion experience. As far as Increase Mather and his son Cotton Mather were concerned, this spelt the end of the pure gathered church. Increase Mather, *The Order of the Gospel, Professed and Practised by the Churches of Christ in New England* (Boston: B. Green & J Allen for Nicholas Buttolph, 1700). This is the work written in specific opposition to Stoddard’s *Doctrine of Instituted Churches* in which Mather seeks to defend the New England way of the Cambridge Platform and the Half-way Covenant before Stoddard’s innovations or, as Mather saw it, corruptions, writing, “wherein these [earlier New England] churches did chiefly Excel was their Order, Especially in their great Strictness as to admission to the Lords supper [sic].” Mather, *The Order of the Gospel, Professed and Practised by the Churches of Christ in New England*, 5. Cited in Strange, “Jonathan Edwards on Visible Sainthood: the Communion Controversy,” 114.



that ordinance would be available to all. No distinction was made between those who professed faith and those who did not. Though Stoddard may not have adopted this position because of political expediency, his position nevertheless did create an identity between church and town.<sup>16</sup> Still, church membership, that is full or communicant membership, conferred on its recipients a respectability that nothing else quite did.<sup>17</sup>

### III CONFRONTING THE CRISIS: EDWARDS ON THE OFFENSIVE

In confronting this crisis of membership based on social pragmatics rather than overt regeneration, the fully formed persona of Edwards was manifest. Whereas previous conflicts had been in the wider world and had engaged relatively distant opponents, he was now confronting real individuals in everyday life in his own back yard. It was in this local arena that the previously defensive and apologetic Edwards was to become aggressively offensive, as expression of his matured persona as a self-assured theological and ecclesial leader who was entitled to be heeded.

When Edwards was installed as assistant to his grandfather in 1727, he became co-administrator of the lax mode of admission to the sacraments that had prevailed in Northampton and throughout Connecticut River Valley for some thirty years. This did not sit well with Edwards and would gnaw at him until he corrected the situation. Many of Northampton's members had been brought up under the lenient practices of Stoddardeanism.<sup>18</sup> Edwards's change of position on admission to the Lord's Supper was influenced by the phenomena of the Great Awakening. Many who claimed to have been religiously affected during the 1735 and 1740-42 revivals continued to lead lives that were manifestly lacking in love to God and neighbour. Their temporary and shallow response indicated to Edwards that they were not truly converted and the lax standards for admission to the Lord's Supper further contributed to the problem of an unconverted congregation.

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<sup>16</sup> Many of the surrounding towns in Western Massachusetts also adopted Stoddardeanism. The pressure on the churches to loosen communion practices so that the state might be furnished with more qualified citizens was removed when the political landscape altered before the turn of the eighteenth century. Church membership came to be no longer required for the right to vote and hold office. In 1684 the Massachusetts Charter was annulled and the colony was put under direct royal rule. In 1686 the colony was enfolded into the Dominion of New England, though the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and 1689 brought an end to this arrangement that was roundly despised by the colonists. A new charter was issued in 1691 that ended the days of the franchise being strictly restricted to full members of the churches. Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 111-18.

<sup>17</sup> Strange, "Jonathan Edwards on Visible Sainthood: the Communion Controversy," 116.

<sup>18</sup> John F. Jamieson, "Jonathan Edwards's Change of Position on Stoddardeanism," *Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 1 (1981): 89.

Edwards had of course given serious thought to the doctrine of the church. His definition of a particular church as “a company of God’s worship and service” is not inconsistent with historic congregational piety.<sup>19</sup> In Miscellany 399, written during the earlier years of Edwards’s Northampton ministry, he defined his understanding of the church:

By the church, in Scripture, is certainly meant nothing else but God’s people or ... Christ’s people, either really or at least externally and in appearance. ... And, by a particular true church, must be meant a society of men that are visibly God’s people, or so, really, in the eye of Christian judgment, and that are indeed joined together in the Christian holy worship.<sup>20</sup>

Clearly many of the Northampton parishioners did not qualify. For Edwards, the question of who could take communion involved the question: who is visibly a Christian or, in other words, who is visibly a saint? Stoddard, while realizing that there were religious people without grace, had employed the innovative approach of allowing such people to come to the communion table because he believed the table itself was a converting grace. By contrast, however, in one of his earlier *Miscellanies* Edwards offers his definition:

By Visible Christians must be meant being Christian in what is visible, or in what appears, or in what is outward. To be a Christian really is to have faith and holiness and obedience of heart. To be outwardly a Christian is to have outward faith, that is profession of faith, and outward holiness in the visible life and conversation.<sup>21</sup>

Edwards was not exactly seeking a return to the kind of narrative of grace prescribed by the Cambridge Platform, but he was heading in that direction. The evidence that he sought in ascertaining whether a real work of grace had occurred in a person was outward godliness, coupled with a verbal profession of having received the grace of God.<sup>22</sup> This was Edwards’s platform and by the early forties, “many of his brother ministers and many in his congregation knew of his changed view, and by 1745 it was

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<sup>19</sup> There is constantly to be seen in his thought a tendency to embody the visible church in higher and higher unities. He expresses a settled preference for Presbyterian over congregational polity; he leans toward ... a “higher synod” having the same disciplinary powers over the local congregation as the latter has over its individual members; and he approves regional and national churches as the natural division of Christendom. Thomas A. Schafer, “Jonathan Edwards’s Conception of the Church,” *Church History* 24, no. 1 (March 1955): 57.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany 399,” in Thomas A. Schafer, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* Vol. 13 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 464-5.

<sup>21</sup> Edwards, “Miscellany 345,” *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>22</sup> Strange, “Jonathan Edwards on Visible Sainthood: the Communion Controversy,” 109.

an open secret.”<sup>23</sup> It was only a matter of time before Edwards would declare his views publicly.

When Edwards let his views be known more widely, the people immediately raised the issue of the timing, so soon after the death of John Stoddard on July 19, 1748. More than likely this last great Stoddard would have been Edwards’s most formidable opponent when Edwards repudiated his father’s doctrines. Edwards was compelled to solicit affidavits and testimony from various parties who affirmed that he had been of this position for some time, and only lacked the opportunity to make it public because no one applied for admission to the Lord’s Table.<sup>24</sup> Commencing his campaign against Solomon Stoddard’s practices appeared to betray Stoddard’s name and memory and antagonized Edwards’s opponents. He could hardly have picked a worse time to launch his revolution.

In February 1749, when Edwards formally announced to the Standing Committee that he would admit to full communion only those he judged “in profession, and in the eye of the church’s Christian judgment, godly or gracious persons,” he touched off an emotional and political earthquake. Church members were transported into “uncommon Degree of Rage and Madness,” and Edwards perceived so “great a ferment in the town,” that he delayed preaching on the topic.<sup>25</sup> Moving quickly and acting almost as one, the church and the town told Edwards that, unless he recanted, he would be asked to resign.<sup>26</sup> Edwards was convinced that he would be dismissed from Northampton, but he would not back down.

A number of factors contributed to the anti-Edwards atmosphere in Northampton. Edwards was one of the Hampshire ministers who opposed the popular appointment of Robert Breck in Springfield. As late as August 1735, he co-signed letters critical of Breck that the Hampshire Association sent to the Springfield church. He was asked to write the defence of the Hampshire Association’s actions. That defence was *A Letter to the Author of the Pamphlet* (1737), the final shot in a very public quarrel between certain Boston ministers who befriended Breck and those in Hampshire County who opposed him.<sup>27</sup> In another blow to his

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<sup>23</sup> Ola Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-58: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 245.

<sup>24</sup> Strange, “Jonathan Edwards on Visible Sainthood: the Communion Controversy,” 131.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church,” in *Jonathan Edwards Ecclesiastical Writings*, 174.

<sup>26</sup> Hall, “Editor’s Introduction,” 17.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Brewer, the long time minister of First Precinct, Springfield, died in 1733. Seeking to replace him, the church attempted twice to recruit Yale graduates. These efforts failed and it turned to Harvard and in May 1734 invited Robert Breck (regarded as having strong Arminian tendencies) to preach with a view to settlement.

social standing, Edwards's clumsy heavy-handedness in publicly censuring the young men of a number of the leading families in the church over their lewd taunting of the young women, regarding the structure and function of their reproductive anatomy, left the town in an uproar.<sup>28</sup> But perhaps the most damage to his popularity was occasioned by the death of Colonel John Stoddard on June 19, 1748, which shook the foundations of Edwards's relationship to the town. Probably no eighteenth-century clergyman in America sustained a closer relationship to so powerful a regional magistrate. Most recently "Squire Stoddard" had been the head of the committee that recommended Edwards's stabilized salary. "Magistrate and pastor, uncle and nephew, stood shoulder to shoulder as God's representatives for preserving the old order and promoting true religion."<sup>29</sup> Edwards's eulogy for Stoddard, preached in Northampton the Sabbath after the squire's death, spared nothing in praise of his patron. Tactlessly, however, Edwards could not resist the opportunity to contrast his uncle's virtues with the vices of many of the men who had surrounded the magistrate, some of whom were in the audience. He also took a swipe at some of the more widespread vices of the mourners.<sup>30</sup> The standard of behaviour that he expected in himself and others was very high, but the manner and occasion of his saying so did not endear him to his parishioners.

The public backlash against Edwards's moral harangues in no way diminished his aggressive campaign – if anything it re-enforced his conviction that his clerical authority as moral judge and jury had to be exercised. After telling the church of his views and being denied the opportunity to expound them from the pulpit, he wrote his *Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church*<sup>31</sup> in the spring of 1749. Obviously he had spent considerable time thinking about the issue prior to writing. The whole treatise hinges upon the idea that only church members in complete standing should be admitted to the Lord's Supper and to the full privileges of church membership.

Edwards divided his *Humble Inquiry* into three parts, and like many of his treatises, it is replete with thoroughly developed series of arguments. He takes the

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Breck was installed and ordained in January 1736 despite the opposition of a majority of the ministers of Hampshire County. Jonathan Edwards, "A Letter to the Author of the Pamphlet Called An Answer to the Hampshire Narrative," in *Jonathan Edwards Ecclesiastical Writings*, 91-163.

<sup>28</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 2003), 293-4.

<sup>29</sup> After years of refusing Edwards's persistent requests to stabilize his salary, the town meeting voted "by a great majority" to a generous inflation proof settlement, which made him one of the highest paid pastors in the region. *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>31</sup> Edwards, "An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church," 169.

first part of the book to present his thesis and to clarify his terms. In the second part he offers his reasons for his position and engages many of the ideas of Stoddard in the process. Finally, he raises and answers twenty various objections to his position in the third part. These objections include biblical references, theological issues, and arguments from experience.<sup>32</sup>

Point by point, Edwards took up Stoddard's views on communion in his *Appeal to the Learned* (1709) and rejected them.<sup>33</sup> Edwards's *Humble Inquiry* was answered by one of his opponents from the Williams clan, Solomon Williams. Edwards replied after he left Northampton in *Misrepresentations Corrected, and Truth Vindicated, In a Reply to the Rev. Solomon William's Book, intituled, The True State of the Question concerning the Qualifications necessary to lawful Communion in the Christian Sacraments* (1752). The literary battle was fully engaged.

In his preface to his *Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church*, Edwards stated that he had formerly been of Stoddard's opinion, "which I imbibed from his books, even from my childhood, and have in my proceedings conformed to his practice; though never without some difficulties ...."<sup>34</sup> He expressed his reluctance to announce his disagreement with Stoddard's position:

A distrust of my own understanding and deference to the authority of so venerable a man, the seeming strength of his argument, together with the success he had in ministry, and his great reputation and influence, prevailed for a long time to bear down on my scruples. But the difficulties and uneasiness on my mind increasing, as I became more studied in divinity, and as I improved in experience, this brought me to closer diligence and care to search the scriptures, and more impartially to examine and weigh the arguments of my grandfather, and such other authors as I could get on his side of the question. By which means after long searching, pondering, viewing, and reviewing, I gained satisfaction, became fully

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<sup>32</sup> Stephen J. Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards. A Guided Tour of His Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 132.

<sup>33</sup> Hall, "Editor's Introduction," 18.

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Preface to An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church," 169.

settled in the opinion I now maintain, as in this discourse here offered for public view; and dared to proceed no further in a practice and administration herewith.<sup>35</sup>

Arriving at such a position and expressing it in both the pulpit and the press required a great deal of soul searching and time by Edwards. It was something he was quite reluctant to do: “It is a far from pleasing circumstance of this publication that it is against what my honoured grandfather strenuously maintained ... I can truly say, on account of this and some other considerations, it is what I engage in with the greatest reluctance that I ever undertook any public service in my life.”<sup>36</sup> As reluctant as he was, and as distasteful as the prospects were, nevertheless he felt compelled to write this book. He explained the reason in a veiled reference: “I have been brought to this necessity in divine providence by such a situation of affairs and coincidence of circumstances and events, as I choose at present to be silent about; and which is not needful, nor perhaps expedient, for me to publish to the world.”<sup>37</sup> While he would not want parishioners to think his change of mind was based on personal experience, Edwards’s own conversion experience loomed large in his theology, as did his father’s counsel and example. Timothy Edwards had demanded a step-by-step conversion narrative in his church at East Windsor where Edwards had grown up. Now, more assured of his role as an authoritative leader through upbringing, experience and the “late work of God,” Edwards acted with a sense of commitment that demanded he make no retreat.

After offering apologies for printing views so thoroughly the opposite of Stoddard’s, Edwards invoked Stoddard’s own opinions to show that he was in fact obligated to examine the practices of the “fathers” and not to look upon their principles as “oracles,” pointing to his grandfather’s assertion of the “scriptural and Protestant maxim, that we ought to call no man on earth master, or make the greatest and holiest of mere men the ground of our belief of any doctrine in religion.”<sup>38</sup> Edwards’s knowledge of his grandfather’s maxims was exhaustive. Endeavouring to prove his grandfather wrong, he quoted from writings that Stoddard published in his battle with the Mathers over his own changes to the rules for taking part in communion:

Certainly we are not obliged to think any man infallible, who himself utterly disclaims infallibility. Very justly Mr. Stoddard observes in his *Appeal to the Learned* (p.97). All Protestants agree, that there is no infallibility at Rome; and I

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 169-70.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 167.

know nobody else pretends to any, since the apostles' days. It may possibly be a fault (says Mr Stoddard) to depart from the ways of our fathers; but it may also be a virtue, and an eminent act of obedience, to depart from them in some things. Men are wont to make a great noise, that we are bringing in innovations, and depart from the old way.... Surely 'tis commendable for us to examine the practices of our fathers, we have no sufficient reason to take practices upon trust from them. Thus, in these very seasonable and apposite sayings, Mr. Stoddard, though dead, yet speaketh: and here (to apply them to my own case), he tells me, that I am not at all blameable, for not taking his principles on trust; that notwithstanding the high character justly belonging to him, I ought not to look on his principles as oracles .... nay, surely that I am, even to be commended, for examining his practice, and judging for myself; that it would ill become me, to do otherwise.<sup>39</sup>

Edwards believed his grandfather “vindicates my present conduct in the present case, and warns all with whom I am concerned, not to be at all displeased with me, or to find the least fault with me, merely because I examine for myself, have a judgment of my own, and am for practicing in some particulars different from him, how positive soever he was that his judgment and practice were right.”<sup>40</sup> He set out his preferred procedure that he thought should characterize the examination of prospective communicants:

If any are known to be persons of an honest character, and appear to be of good understanding in the doctrine of Christianity, and particularly those doctrines that teach the grand condition of salvation, and the nature of true saving religion, and publicly and seriously profess the great and main things wherein the essence of true religion or godliness consists, and their conversation is agreeable; this justly recommends 'em to the good opinion of the public, whatever suspicions and fears any particular person, either the minister, or some other, may entertain, from what he in particular has observed, perhaps from the manner of expressing himself in giving an account of his experiences, or an obscurity in the order and method of his experiences, et. The minister in receiving him to the communion of the church, is to act as a public officer, and in behalf of the public society, and not

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 169.

merely for himself, and therefore is to be governed, in acting, by a proper visibility of godliness in the eye of the public.<sup>41</sup>

Trying to anticipate the opposition's accusations and defend his reputation, Edwards expressed his concern that some would no doubt stand against his principles, as being of the "same pernicious tendency with those of the Separatists." To such people, he proffered a solemn protestation of the sincerity of his aims and the great care he had taken to avoid anything erroneous mischievous.

But as to my success in these my upright aims and endeavours, I must leave it to every reader to judge for himself, after he has carefully perused, and impartially considered the following discourse; which, considering the nature and importance of the subject, I hope all serious readers will accompany with their earnest prayers to the Father of Lights, for his gracious direction and influence.<sup>42</sup>

Edwards's high spiritual ideals and exalted conception of the church found little resonance in his Northampton congregation. His rejection of his grandfather's communion position, his exacting requirements and unreachable standards were too onerous for the Northampton people who were unwilling to allow him authority over them. They now saw the opportunity to rid themselves of their punctilious and officious pastor. The crisis now reached its climactic point.

#### **IV MOUNTING A DEFENCE: FAMILY AND FRIENDS RALLY**

As the controversy dragged on, Sarah Edwards entered the fray on her husband's behalf, explaining that Jonathan had had scruples about his grandfather's view for years,<sup>43</sup> but knowing how difficult it would be for the townspeople to accept a repudiation of Stoddard's policies, he had decided that it would be best to gradually let his opinion be known so as to let the people get used to the idea. He had alluded to his position in *Religious Affections* (1746), and had discussed his views openly with friends and with a number of townspeople. Apparently, he had intended to fully discuss his view with Colonel Stoddard who he knew would oppose him, but had been waiting for the occasion of a suitable applicant for church

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<sup>41</sup> Edwards, "An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church," 179-80.

<sup>42</sup> Edwards, "Preface to An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church," 174.

<sup>43</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 348.



membership.<sup>44</sup> While out riding in 1746, Jonathan had taken the opportunity to tell her at length of his qualms about the Stoddardean practice of admitting to membership those who make “no credible profession of godliness.” Between 1746 and 1748 Edwards, according to Sarah, had expressed his views to Samuel Buell, John Brainerd, Elisha Pomeroy and Aaron Burr. When townspeople were also present or came into the conversation, he made no effort to conceal his opinions. To Burr he had commented that his parishioners might well throw him out and bring his family to poverty.<sup>45</sup> In an especially memorable conversation from early 1747 recalled by John Searle, a former Northampton resident, the pastor had spoken of his previous controversies and of what he knew lay ahead. Then he had said with great emotion, “It seems I am born to be a man of strife.” To Sarah he lamented that the prospect ahead appeared to him “like a bottomless ocean.”<sup>46</sup>

Friends in Scotland and Boston provided Edwards with moral support and a much needed sounding board during the controversy. In a letter to Reverend John Erskine on May 20, 1749, Edwards introduced the communion controversy, assessed the dispute and anticipated that it would cost him his position. He was unable to continue the tradition he inherited from his grandfather when he realized it was wrong. He said:

I have nothing very comfortable to inform of concerning the present state of religion in this place. A very great difficulty has arisen between me and my people, relating to qualifications for communion at the Lord’s Table. My honoured grandfather Solomon Stoddard, my predecessor in the ministry over this church, strenuously maintained the Lord’s Supper to be a converting ordinance; and urged all to come who were not of scandalous life, though they knew themselves to be unconverted. I formerly conformed to his practice, but I have had difficulties with respect to it, which have been long increasing; till I dared no longer to proceed in the former way; which has occasioned great uneasiness among my people; and has filled all the country with noise; which has obliged me to write something on the subject which is now in the press. I know

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<sup>44</sup> Testimony of Sarah Edwards, June 17, 1750, from *The Congregationalist and Christian World*, October 3, 1903, reprinted in Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 485-7.

<sup>45</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 349.

<sup>46</sup> Testimony of Sarah Edwards, June 17, 1750, in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*, 485-7. See also Hall, “Editor’s Introduction,” 53 n8.

not but this affair will issue in a separation between me and my people. I desire your prayers that God would guide me in every step in this affair.<sup>47</sup>

In a letter to the Reverend Thomas Foxcroft on May 24, 1749, Edwards cited colleagues who concurred with him on the communion controversy, weighed possible consequences of it and reaffirmed his determination to pursue his course. The gravity of the situation caused him to believe that it would “overthrow me, not only with regard to my usefulness in the work of ministry here, but everywhere.”<sup>48</sup>

If I should be wholly cast out of the ministry, I should be in many respects in a poor case. I shall not be likely to be serviceable to my generation, or get a subsistence in a business of a different nature. I am by nature very unfit for secular business; and especially am now, after I have been so long in the work of the ministry. I am now comfortably settled, have as large a salary settled upon me as most have out of Boston, and have the largest and most chargeable family of any minister, perhaps within and hundred miles of me.<sup>49</sup>

He mentioned that some of the ministers of Connecticut, who had been chief favourers and promoters of the late work of God, “have a spirit of opposing zeal excited on this occasion (from whom I should have least expected it), and appear strangely ready to entertain groundless surprises, and receive false reports and misrepresentations concerning me, which the country is very full of.”<sup>50</sup> Edwards believed he had:

many enemies abroad in the country, who hate me for my stingy principles, enthusiasm, rigid proceedings and that now are expecting full triumph over me. I need the prayers of my fathers and brethren who are friendly to me, that I may have wisdom given me by my great master, and that I may be enabled to conduct with as steady faithfulness to him, under all trials and whatever may be the issue of this affair. I seem as it were to be casting myself off from a precipice; and have no other way, but to go on, as it were blindfold, i.e. shutting my eyes to

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<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to John Erskine,” in George S. Claghorn, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 16 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 271.

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Reverend Thomas Foxcroft,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 284.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

everything else but the evidences of the mind and will of God, and the path of duty; which I would observe with the utmost care.<sup>51</sup>

Edwards further requested that Foxcroft endeavour to dissuade Rector Elisha Williams of Boston from writing against him. Though not afraid of the strength of any fair arguing against his views, Edwards regarded himself as at a disadvantage because of his circumstances compared to Williams, who “doubtless has it in the power of his hands to do me a great deal of hurt,” even though his arguments be weak:

If they should be far worse than nothing in the esteem of observing and discerning readers, yet its only being said that Rector Williams has written an answer to me, will do me great hurt with my people. It would be very likely way to discourage Mr Williams from writing, if he could be made to believe that it would not be for his honor; and particularly if he could be artfully led to think that my books would go to Great Britain, to England and Scotland; and that his opposing me in this matter would be offensive to learned men there, and not for his honor in that part of the world.”<sup>52</sup>

If Elisha Williams could be deterred from writing against him, it would save Edwards “a long and perhaps almost endless labour of replying.” Edwards would “look upon it as my duty to pursue the matter to the end; and to write as long as I see there is any need of writing; in order to defend this important doctrine, and God gives me the ability and opportunity.”<sup>53</sup> Opposition merely strengthened Edwards’s resolve to carry through his mission.

## **V THE CAMPAIGN IN REVIEW: “NARRATIVE OF COMMUNION CONTROVERSY”**

Edwards had a compulsion to record and to be recorded. He detailed the negotiations that unfolded in the aftermath of his announcement to the Northampton Standing Committee in February 1749 in his “Narrative of Communion Controversy,” from its inception to the summoning of the council that met to dismiss him in June 1750.<sup>54</sup> Thus he provided a record of the saga from his perspective, which throws more light on his developing self-awareness. The “Narrative” is shaped by the attacks on Edwards. In the opening pages he stated:

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 284-5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>54</sup> Hall, “Editor’s Introduction,” 77.

I have had difficulties in my mind for many years, with regard to admission of members into the church who made no pretense to real godliness. These gradually increased, and at length to such a degree, that I found I could not with an easy conscience be active in admitting any more members in our former manner without better satisfaction.<sup>55</sup>

This caused him to “more closely to apply myself to an inquiry into the matter, and search the Scriptures, and read and examine such books as were written to defend the admission of persons to the sacraments without a profession of saving faith.”<sup>56</sup> Through his reading and study on the topic, Edwards was further convinced that this was a wrong practice.<sup>57</sup> He decided that he would not admit anyone into membership without a “profession of godliness” despite the “uneasiness and public noise and excitement it would cause.” Edwards continued to “diligently search, improving the opportunity which divine providence should give me ... until somebody should offer to come into the church,” so he could consider their individual application on its merits.<sup>58</sup>

At the end of 1748, a young man who gave evidence of a godly character sought to come to commune in Edwards’s church in Northampton. This was just the opportunity Edwards wanted because he did not want to mark the institution of the new standards with the exclusion of an applicant which would make the move look petty and personal. Edwards gave the young man some samples of brief professions of heartfelt faith that he might affirm and told him that “he might draw up something similar in his own words.”<sup>59</sup> As soon as word spread about what Edwards planned, the townspeople erupted. Not wanting to be part of an unpopular innovation, the young man withdrew.<sup>60</sup> Soon after, a young woman came to Edwards to join the church, willing to affirm a profession according to Edwards’s standards. Edwards approached the committee requesting that she be admitted to full membership but, given the committee’s animosity towards Edwards and their loyalty to the Stoddardean

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<sup>55</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Narrative of the Communion Controversy,” in *Jonathan Edwards Ecclesiastical Writings*, 507.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>57</sup> Edwards, “Preface to An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church,” 169-70.

<sup>58</sup> Edwards, “Narrative of the Communion Controversy,” 507-8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 508.

<sup>60</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 347.

position, they refused to admit the young woman to membership, by a vote of fifteen to three.<sup>61</sup>

Edwards used every means possible to sway the opinion of the people. On October 15, he set apart a day for fasting and prayer, and put the matter to the vote in the following words:

That a day set apart for solemn fasting and prayer, to pray to God that he would have mercy on this church under its present dark and sorrowful circumstances; that he would forgive the sins of both minister and people; that he would make us to be of a right spirit and enlighten us all, that we may know what the mind and will of God is; That that which is agreeable to his will, and that alone. May be established; and that God would restore peace and prosperity to the church.<sup>62</sup>

This was approved by a general concurrence. Then Edwards proposed “that the services of the day should be carried on by some of the neighbouring ministers, as supposing that their services would be more acceptable, and less liable to suspicion, than mine. I particularly proposed, Mr. Woodbridge of Hatfield, Mr. Williams of Hadley and Mr. Judd of Southampton, they being the nearest.”<sup>63</sup>

After this, Edwards endeavoured to admit to the membership of the church several of the townspeople who made a credible “profession of godliness” in private. Edwards made a proposal to the church in the following words:

That these ministers who shall be called to assist in the fast, be sought to for advice with respect to the admission of such persons as are able and willing to make a credible profession of true godliness; not that minister or people should bound by their advice to anything contrary to their consciences, but to see if they cannot find out some way in which these persons may be admitted, consistent with a good conscience in both the pastor and church, which may be proceeded in for the present until our present unhappy controversies can be brought to an issue.<sup>64</sup>

Some members thought it was high time “the whole affair was brought to an issue with regard to admission of others” whom Edwards had prevented from becoming members, “as well as those who stood ready to make a profession of godliness.” Ultimately, all agreed that

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<sup>61</sup> Edwards, “Narrative of the Communion Controversy,” 509- 10.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 512.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 512.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 512.

some of the neighbouring ministers should be consulted “with regard to a proper course to be taken by the church, in order to a proper information of the grounds of my opinion, that things might be speedily ripened for an issue.”<sup>65</sup> The argument continued as to whether it was appropriate for Edwards to offer his arguments from the pulpit. He was exasperated that he could not get the townspeople to listen to his views or read his *Humble Inquiry*. In a letter to them he wrote:

I, the subscriber, do hereby signify and declare to such as it may concern, that if my people will wait until the book I am preparing relative to the admission of members into the church is published, I will resign the ministry over this church, if the church desires it, after they have had opportunity pretty generally to read my said book, and after they have first asked advice of a council mutually chosen, and followed their advice with regard to the regular steps to be taken previous to their vote: the following things also being provided, viz. That none of the brethren be admitted to vote in this affair but such as have either read my said book or have heard from the pulpit what I have to say in defence of the doctrine that is the subject of it; that the society will engage that I shall be freed from all rates; and that a regular council do approve my thus resigning my pastoral office over this church. Jonathan Edwards. Northampton, April 13, 1749.<sup>66</sup>

On October 16, 1749, a number of the inhabitants of the precinct drew up and signed the following writing directed to the committee of the precinct:<sup>67</sup>

We, the subscribers, desire that there may be a precinct meeting as quick as may be, for the precinct to take into consideration Mr Edwards’s doctrine with respect to the admission of members into full communion into the church. 1. We desire that Mr Edwards, by the precinct or by a committee which the precinct shall appoint, may be friendly and in a Christian manner treated with and entreated to recede or come back from his principles, which he has pretended to maintain in his late book, against his own practice and Mr Stoddard’s practice and principles, with respect to the admission of church members. Which, if he refuse, 2. To see if the precinct will come into his notions or principles about the admission of church members. Which, if the town refuse, 3. Then to determine whether the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 512-13.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 510-11.

<sup>67</sup> “Precinct” refers to a civil body charged with ecclesiastical business in Northampton as in some other New England towns. The term was used interchangeably with “parish”. The precinct encompassed every male taxpayer. Hall, *Jonathan Edwards Ecclesiastical Writings*, 513 n9.

precinct do not think that it will be more for the honor of God, and more likely to promote the interests of religion, and peace and comfort in the precinct, to endeavour after a separation, or anything else which the precinct shall see cause to cone into; which we desire may be done in the most friendly and Christian manner possible.<sup>68</sup>

Edwards's opponents had accomplished a tactical coup. The Precinct meetings continued until Edwards was dismissed the following June. As the minister, Edwards was not allowed to attend the meetings and received a report the evening before it was to be considered at the meeting. Having no opportunity to confer with members of the committee, he forwarded a letter to them - which did him little good. Edwards explained that his reason for writing to them was:

not to perplex you, nor clog any reasonable proceedings, but to do my duty to you as your guide in religious matters and that I may do what is proper to prevent any just blame that you or I myself might hereafter fall under; and therefore I hope that what I have said will be taken in good part, from your affectionate pastor, who desires that you may go in the way of your duty, and in the way of God's blessing, and may be a people happy in God's favour.<sup>69</sup>

When it became inevitable that a council would be called to advise on the controversy, Edwards insisted on the privilege not only of selecting a certain number of its members, but also of choosing them from outside Hampshire County.<sup>70</sup> Edwards was at odds with most of his ministerial neighbours and wanted persons on the council who were sympathetic to his person and point of view. He was finally accorded the privilege of selecting two such delegations.<sup>71</sup> The council that met in June 1750 consisted of five ministers from churches nominated by the church and five by Edwards.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Though the committee issued a warrant in "terms agreeable to this demand," several people objected "that it was very improper seeing we had agreed upon a day of fasting and prayer to seek light from God; that such steps should be taken before that day passed, the meeting was adjourned for a fortnight.

Edwards, "Narrative of the Communion Controversy," 514.

<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to the First Precinct, Northampton," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 293-5.

<sup>70</sup> For a church in the Hampshire Ministerial association, as was Northampton, to sever its ties with its pastor, the concurrence of an *ad hoc* committee of neighbouring churches was needed, together with the precinct and congregation. Edwards offers an account of this at some length in his "Narrative of the Communion Controversy."

<sup>71</sup> Hall, "Editor's Introduction," 77.

<sup>72</sup> The church at Cold Spring, one of his five churches, refused to send a lay delegate, leaving a council of nineteen people that divided ten to nine on the issue of Edwards's immediate dismissal.

Edwards's efforts to involve neighbouring ministers in the battle to be able to explain his views from the pulpit failed miserably. On October 26, the fast was observed and the next week the precinct met and chose a committee to confer with Edwards and "consider what measures are proper to be taken in order to issue the dispute between me and my people concerning the qualifications for full communion in the church, or to that purpose; and then adjourned themselves to Thursday, the week following."<sup>73</sup> When they asked Edwards whether he had any measures to propose, he told them:

I had already proposed what I supposed to be reasonable, in that, in the first place, I proposed that my people should give me a fair hearing of the reasons of my opinion from the pulpit ... and secondly, when they had refused this, I had proposed that it should be left to some of the neighbouring ministers whether it was not reasonable that they should comply with this proposal.<sup>74</sup>

Wrangling over procedural matters continued unabated. Edwards pursued his quest to proclaim his views from the pulpit. This was, he believed, his inalienable right as the minister. The committee members said they would endeavour to "bring the precinct to yield" if Edwards would give them a copy of his sermon/lecture before the event so they could take it to some other minister "that he might see it and prepare an answer to it," before it was preached, and this same minister would also have the opportunity to refute Edwards's views from the pulpit immediately after Edwards. Edwards found this unpalatable and insisted on seeing the "discourse of my antagonist, as he was to see mine, that I might stand on even ground with him."<sup>75</sup> Edwards then advised them that it was irregular for the precinct "to take the consideration and management of this ecclesiastical affair into their hands in the manner they had done." But, of course, they insisted it was not and again no conclusions were reached. Since the same leaders were involved, he did not have much prospect of sympathy in either venue.<sup>76</sup>

The next Monday, November 6, the committee met without Edwards and drew up another report about seeking the advice of neighbouring ministers, "having previously conferred with Mr Edwards," on the matter.<sup>77</sup> Edwards then sent a letter to the precinct on November 9

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Robert Breck et al., *An Account of the Conduct of the Council which dismissed the Rev Mr Edwards from the Pastoral Care of the First Church at Northampton* (Boston 1750), 4. Cited in Hall, "Editor's Introduction," 78.

<sup>73</sup> Edwards, "Narrative of the Communion Controversy," 516.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 516.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 517.

<sup>76</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 357.

<sup>77</sup> Edwards, "Narrative of the Communion Controversy," 517-18.



stating that he had not been a part of this decision and had only heard of it after the event through one of the committee members showing him a copy of their decision.<sup>78</sup> Later, on November 13, he wrote to the church committee meeting that ensued, proposing that a council of mutually chosen churches be created. This was defeated and as the battle intensified, the church voted to suspend observance of the Lord's Supper.<sup>79</sup> Edwards may well have held the authority of his office, but the congregation was gaining the political upper hand. As Edwards had taken a clear position that distanced himself from what he considered unacceptable practices, he was now finding that the congregation was similarly distancing itself from him.

## VI SHARING THE PAIN

Edwards unburdened himself by writing to friends. On November 21, 1749, Edwards again wrote to Reverend Thomas Foxcroft, offering consolation to Foxcroft on the death of his wife and reviewing the developments in the communion controversy since the summer. He wrote candidly and confidentially, listing events as well as personal reactions. Edwards saw dismissal as inevitable, but he first wanted to follow all proper procedures to ensure that his position was understood and, if possible, to be judged by an impartial council. Edwards expressed his innermost feelings to Foxcroft:

My afflictions and troubles are also very great, though of another kind. The difficulties in the church relating to my opinion about the qualifications of communicants are come to great height indeed.<sup>80</sup> .... The alienation of the people is exceeding great. They have had, not a little to increase the flame from some gentlemen abroad; and particularly from Col. Elisha Williams of Wethersfield and Mr Jonathan Ashley of Deerfield. A great part of my people seem to be industriously engaged to reproach me at home and abroad; and represent all that I say and do in the darkest colors. And seek my separation from 'em very much as a man would strive to gain his point, in a great lawsuit. And, indeed, I have not the least expectation of continuing their minister; though I believe my people think I am struggling to my utmost for it.<sup>81</sup> .... I think the people seem to be in

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 518-19.

<sup>79</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to the Northampton Church Committee," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 295.

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Reverend Thomas Foxcroft," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 297.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 301.

awful circumstances, and in the highway to ruin, for the present and future generations; and I durst not leave them without first using all proper endeavours that they may be saved from ruin, in the use of suitable means, as by the advice of an able and proper council, etc. And then besides, since I am in so many respects reflected upon and reproached for my conduct, and so many misrepresentations are continually carried abroad in the country, I think it greatly concerns me, before I leave this people, that our affairs should be looked into and judged by an impartial council. And indeed, I greatly need the advice of such a council to know how to conduct myself in so difficult a situation. I earnestly desire your prayers, and desire you would lay my case before other ministers, that you think are friendlily disposed, and desire their prayers for me, that I may have God's presence and be guided by his counsel in the great trials and temptations, and wish you would write me your thoughts.<sup>82</sup>

On December 6, 1749, Edwards wrote to his friend Reverend Joseph Bellamy, who had not escaped the wrath of the church because of his closeness to Edwards. He said:

As for the present state of things here with regard to our controversy, 'tis not very easy for me to give you an idea of it, without writing a sheet or two of paper. But in brief, things are in great confusion: the tumult is vastly greater than when you was here, and is rising higher and higher continually. The people have got their resentments to a great height towards you since you have been gone; and you are spoken of by 'em with great indignation and contempt. And, I have been informed that Col. Elisha Williams of Whethersfield has written a letter to one of the principal men of this church, wherein he speaks contemptibly and with resentment of your and Mr John Searle's last visit here.<sup>83</sup>

There have been abundance of meetings about our affairs since you was here: society meetings, and church meetings, and meetings of committees; of committees of the parish and committees of the church; conferences, debates,

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<sup>82</sup> Edwards casually introduced "another affair" to Foxcroft that had taken his attention. He wished that the "Commissioners would take care that there may be a man sent them of sound principles, and pious character," to the Indians at Stockbridge. Much has already been contributed towards an Indian school at Stockbridge, and if it was put "under the care of a missionary of good character, there seems to be the best door for gradually propagating the gospel among the Indians that is opened at present." *Ibid.*, 301-2.

<sup>83</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Reverend Joseph Bellamy," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 307-10.

reports, and proposals drawn up, and replies and remonstrances. The people have a resolution to get me out of town speedily, that disdains all control or check.<sup>84</sup>

You may easily be sensible, dear Sir, that 'tis a time of great trial with me, and that I stand in continual need of the divine presence and merciful conduct in such a state of things as this. I need God's council in every step I take and every word I speak; for all that I do and say is watched by the multitude around me with the utmost strictness and with eyes of the greatest uncharitableness and severity, and let me do or say what I will, my words and actions are represented in dark colors. And the state of things is come to that, they seem to think it greatly concerns 'em to blacken me, and represent me in odious colors to the world, to justify their own conduct. They seem to be sensible that now their character can't stand unless it be on the ruin of mine. They have publicly voted that they will have no more sacraments; and they have no way to justify their own conduct in that, but to represent me as very bad. I therefore desire, dear Sir, your fervent prayers to God. If he be for me, who can be against me? If he be with me, I need not fear ten thousands of the people.<sup>85</sup>

Edwards received unexpected support after writing a letter to the Reverend Peter Clark, May 7, 1750, in which he sought to dissuade Clark from writing a reply to his *Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church*. The effort proved successful. On May 21, 1750, Clark, in an answer to the present letter, not only said that Edwards's views had been misrepresented but in essence agreed with them, writing that "it is a visible profession of faith ... which is the only door ... of admission to the communion of the visible church."<sup>86</sup>In his own defence, Edwards wrote:

I have taken a great deal of pains to explain myself both in what I have written and spoken; but yet I am so unhappy as to be misunderstood by many. Notwithstanding all I can say for myself, there appears (as seems to me) a strange disposition to take me wrong, and to entertain uncharitable and injurious thoughts of my meaning, and also concerning the principles and dispositions I act from, and the ends they suppose I secretly aim at. By which means many at a distance

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 309-10.

<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Reverend Peter Clark," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 341-7.

have conceived very disadvantageous and injurious notions of me.<sup>87</sup> ... I have ever been an enemy to a separating, divisive, factious, uncharitable spirit; and have exerted myself in many ways against such things, as they have abundantly appeared in the country of late years. I have not set myself to oppose ministers, or to encourage a disaffection between ministers and people, under a pretense of their not being converted, not being lively preachers, etc. I have heretofore lived in a happy union with the ministers of this neighbourhood; which I have industriously cultivated, and looked upon as one of the special blessings of my life; but I fear this controversy has in some measure interrupted it, or at least the happy fruits of it. A state of controversy is peculiarly disagreeable to me, and I look upon it as my great calamity, and desire to take it as a frown of providence that should deeply humble me, that I am obliged to enter into such a controversy with my own people. I dreaded it greatly before I began, and nothing could make it tolerable to me, but that I have the testimony of my conscience that I could not avoid it, and so that 'tis an affliction that God lays upon me and calls me to bear.<sup>88</sup>

The town and church pushed relentlessly for Edwards's removal late in 1749. Leading the effort to oust him were the eighty year old town patriarch Deacon Ebenezer Pomeroy and his son Major Seth Pomeroy, the local hero of Louisbourg. Joining them was Edwards's cousin, the ambitious young Joseph Hawley III, a lawyer and son of the man whose suicide had put a damper on the 1735 revival, with whom Edwards had had a falling out over moral and theological issues.<sup>89</sup> When the council asked the church to express its views on whether to continue the pastoral relationship, only twenty-three of the 230 male members voted on Edwards's side. The church council, which included some of his long-standing antagonists such as Robert Breck and Jonathan Ashley, voted for his immediate dismissal.<sup>90</sup> The council summarized the issue, saying that Edwards held that candidates for admission of members to full communion "should make a profession of sanctifying grace," and the church majority held "that the Lord's Supper is a converting ordinance, and consequently that persons, if they have a competency of knowledge, and are of a blameless life, may be admitted to the Lord's

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 343-4.

<sup>89</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 358.

<sup>90</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to John Erskine," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 352-3; Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Thomas Gillespie," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 386.

table.”<sup>91</sup> In asserting his authority, Edwards now found that very authority to be that which alienated him from the council and his own church.

The council did exonerate Edwards personally from widely circulated accusations of his lack of sincerity and integrity in the matter. They concluded that he was “uprightly following the dictates of his own conscience” and commended him for his “Christian spirit and temper.” He was, they declared, “eminently qualified for the work of the Gospel ministry” in any church that shared his views. His demeanour during these proceedings apparently was remarkably calm. One of his supporters, Rev David Hall recorded in his diary:

I never saw the least symptoms of displeasure in his countenance the whole week, but he appeared like a man of God, whose happiness was out of the reach of his enemies, and whose treasure was not only a future but a present good, overbalancing all imaginable ills of life. Even to the astonishment of many, who could not be at rest without his dismissal.<sup>92</sup>

## VII THE PERSON BENEATH THE PERSONA

Edwards was suffering deeply, even if he controlled his outward demeanour. He wrote, “There are but few that know the heart of a minister under my circumstances.”<sup>93</sup> He believed that God had permitted these afflictions to humble him and he questioned whether he had the personal skills to be a pastor. Erskine and other Scottish friends were curious as to whether he would accept a pastorate in Scotland. Edwards replied in July 1750 that he would have no difficulty accepting the “substance of the Westminster confession” and that he had long admired the Church of Scotland’s Presbyterian form of government, especially in the light of the chaos of New England’s polity. But he shrank from the prospect of moving so large a family across the ocean, especially at his advanced age of forty-six. More importantly, he worried whether his “gifts and administration” would suit any congregation that accepted him without trial. Despite these expressed misgivings he left the door open and assured them that “I think my wife is fully of this disposition.”<sup>94</sup>

Edwards apologized to Erskine for not writing sooner due to “my extraordinary circumstances, the multitude of distracting troubles and hurries that I have been involved in,”

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<sup>91</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 575 n12.

<sup>92</sup> Diary of David Hall, MS in Massachusetts Historical Society Boston, quoted in Winslow. *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-58: A Biography*, 236.

<sup>93</sup> Edwards, “Letter to Reverend Peter Clark,” 346.

<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to John Erskine,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 355-6.

and thanked Erskine for his letters, presents of books and concern for him under the difficulties and troubles experienced “by reason of the controversy between me and my people, about the terms of Christian communion.”<sup>95</sup> Edwards went on to state that the controversy had in fact led to his “separation” from his people in the Northampton church:

Many things have appeared that have been exceeding unhappy and uncomfortable in the course of the controversy. The great power of prejudices from education, established custom, and the traditions of ancestors and certain admired teachers, and the exceeding unhappy influence of bigotry has remarkably appeared in the management of this affair. ... There have been many things said and done during our controversy that I am willing should be buried in oblivion; and therefore shall not now declare 'em. But would only say in the general, that there has been that prejudice, and spirit of jealousy, and increasing engagedness of spirit, and fixedness of resolution to gain the point in view, viz., my dismissal from my pastoral office over them, upheld and cherished by a persuasion that herein they only stood for the truth and did their duty; that it has been an exceeding difficult thing for me to say or do anything at all, in order to their being enlightened, or brought to a more calm and sedate consideration of things, without its being misinterpreted, and turned to an occasion of increasing jealousy and prejudice; even those things wherein I have yielded most and done most to gratify the people and assuage their spirits, and win their charity.<sup>96</sup>

Edwards recounted to Erskine how he had preached his farewell sermon “the last Sabbath.” Many in the congregation had seemed to be “much affected” and some had been “exceedingly grieved.” A few who had voted against Edwards had “relentings of heart” but the vast majority of the church would never change. Many in the ministry and civil magistracy had supported the resolution to oust Edwards and he believed the people “never would have been so violent as they have been” without their encouragement.<sup>97</sup> Edwards desired that there might be some benefit might emerge:

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 347-50.

<sup>96</sup> Edwards pointed out to Erskine that the people, “in managing this affair have made chief use of a young gentleman of liberal education and notable abilities and a fluent speaker, of about seven or eight and twenty years of age, my grandfather Stoddard’s grandson, being my mother’s sister’s son [Joseph Hawley, Jr.], a man of lax principles in religion, falling in in some essential things with Arminians, and is very open and bold in it. He was improved as one of the agents for the church, and was their chief spokesman before the council. He very strenuously urged before the council the necessity of an immediate separation .Jonathan Edwards. Ibid., 353.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 354.

Such time of awful changes, dark clouds, and great frowns of heaven on me and my people may be a time of serious consideration, thorough self-reflection and examination, and deep humiliation with me. I desire your fervent prayers for me and those who have heretofore been my people. I know not what will become of them. There seems to be the utmost danger that the younger generations will be carried away by Arminianism, as with a flood. As to the older people, there never appeared so great an indifference among them about things of this nature ... the great concern of the leading part of the town at present will probably be, to come off with flying colors in the issue of the controversy they have had with me, and of what they have done in it; for which they know many condemn them.<sup>98</sup>

Edwards now considered himself and his family “thrown upon the wide ocean of the world, and know not what will become of me and my numerous and chargeable family; nor have I any particular door in view, that I depend upon to be opened for my future serviceableness. ... I am fitted for no other business but study; I should make a poor hand of getting a living by any secular employment.”<sup>99</sup> On the brighter side Edwards believed he and his family were in God’s hands. “I am not anxious concerning his disposal of us. I hope I shall not distrust him, nor be unwilling to submit to his will. And, I have a cause of thankfulness, that there seems also to be such a disposition in my family.”<sup>100</sup>

Edwards was keen that his dismissal received newspaper coverage. He wrote to Thomas Foxcroft on July 31, 1750, requesting that he secure newspaper coverage of his dismissal. Edwards was sorry that “the result of the council that sat on my affair, with the protest against it, was not published in the newspapers; as I think it would be to my advantage that they should be known and made public in all parts of the country.”<sup>101</sup> Here can be seen not just an expression of an aggrieved ego, but an expression of Edwards’s conviction that his voice and his cause rightly should be heard on the wider stage. His sense of assured theological and ecclesial authority, concretized and polarized in this local conflict, warranted recognition on a grander scale.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 354.-5.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 354.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Reverend Thomas Foxcroft,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 359-60.

## VIII THE PARTING SHOT: THE FAREWELL SERMON

Preaching his *Farewell Sermon* on July 1, 1750 to the people who had fired him provided Edwards with the opportunity to play the watchman prophet and vent his pent up frustrations. In this sermon, he articulated his convictions, casting them into the cosmic context of ultimate judgment, wherein his personal vindication is assured. He acknowledged that

Ministers and people, between whom there has been the greatest mutual regard and strictest union, may not only differ in their judgments, and be alienated in affection: but one may rend from the other, and all relation between them be dissolved; the minister may be removed to a distant place, and they may never have any more to do with one another in this world. But, if it be so, there is one meeting more they must have, and that is the last great day of accounts.<sup>102</sup>

On Judgment Day, “Ministers and the people that have been under their care must meet one another, before Christ’s tribunal.” The purpose of this meeting is firstly “to give an account before the Great Judge, of their behaviour one to another, in the relation they stood to each other in this world ... so that He may judge between them, as to any controversies which have subsisted between them in this world,” and so that the ministers and people can “receive an eternal sentence and retribution from the Judge, in the presence of each other, according to their behaviour in the relation they stood in one to another in this present state.”<sup>103</sup> Justice will be administered on the

“great day” to ministers and their people ... all things will be adjusted and settled forever between them; everyone being sentenced and recompensed according to his works; either in receiving and wearing a crown of eternal joy and glory, or in suffering everlasting shame and pain.<sup>104</sup>

Striking fear into the hearts of those who had dared to challenge his authority, he announced that whereas Judgment day will prove glorious for those who have lived their lives in Christ, it will be nothing short of horrific for those who have not.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Farewell Sermon Preached at the First Precinct in Northampton, After the People’s Public Rejection of Their Minister ... on June 22, 1750,” in Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999), 214.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 220-2.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., xlv.



Edwards pointed out that “then” things will be different: “then,” he will be vindicated.

Then it shall appear what the ends are which we have aimed at, what have been the governing principles which we have acted from, and what have been the dispositions, we have exercised in our ecclesiastical disputes and contests.

Then it will appear, whether I acted uprightly, and from a truly conscientious, careful regard to my duty to my great Lord and master ... and

Then our late grand controversy, concerning the qualifications necessary for admission to the privileges of members, in complete standing, in the visible church of Christ, will be examined and judged, in all its parts and circumstances, and the whole set forth in a clear, certain and perfect light.

Then it will appear whether the doctrine which I have preached and published concerning this matter be Christ’s own doctrine ...

Then it will appear whether in declaring this doctrine, and acting agreeable to it, and in my general conduct in this affair, I have been influenced from any regard to my own temporal interest, or honor, or desire to appear wiser than others; or have acted from any sinister, secular views whatsoever; and whether what I have done has not been from a careful, strict and tender regard to the will of my Lord and master, and because I dare not offend him, being satisfied what his will was, after a long, diligent, impartial and prayerful inquiry. ...<sup>106</sup>

Then it will appear whether my people have done their duty to their pastor with respect to this matter; whether they have shown a right temper and spirit on this occasion, whether they have done me justice in hearing, attending to, and considering what I had to say in evidence of what I believed and taught as part of the counsel of God; whether I have been treated with that impartiality, candor and regard which the just Judge esteemed due; and whether, in the many steps which have been taken, and the many things that have been said and done in the course of this controversy, righteousness and charity and Christian decorum have been maintained; or if otherwise, to how great a degree these things have been violated.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 228.

Then every step of the conduct of each of us in this affair, from first to last, and the spirit we have exercised in all, shall be examined and manifested, and our own consciences will speak plain and loud, and each of us shall be convinced, and the world shall know; and never shall there be any more mistake, misrepresentation or misapprehension of the affair to eternity.<sup>107</sup>

Edwards asked the congregation to think about how often they had met together in the house of God in this relation.

How often have I spoken to you, instructed, counselled, warned, directed and fed you, and administered ordinances among you, as the people which were committed to my care, and whose precious souls I had the charge of ... in all probability, this never will be again ... my work is finished which I had to do as your minister; you have publicly rejected me, and my opportunities cease.<sup>108</sup>

Edwards closed his sermon by addressing specific “sorts of person” in the congregation: those who are “professors of godliness amongst us;” those he must leave “in a Christless, graceless condition;” those “who are under some awakenings;” the young people of the congregation; and the children.<sup>109</sup> Finally, he bade them farewell: “I must leave you in the hands of God; I can do no more for you than to pray for you.” His desire was that they “often think about the counsels and warnings” he had given them and he expressed concern about the “future welfare and prosperity” of the church and congregation.<sup>110</sup> They should take great care with regard to the settlement of a minister,

to see to it, or what manner of person he is that you settle ... first, that he be a man of thoroughly sound principles, in the scheme of doctrine which he maintains .... Labor to obtain a man who has an established character, as a person of serious religion, and fervent piety.<sup>111</sup> ... Nothing remains, but that I now take my leave of you, and bid you all farewell; wishing and praying for your best prosperity. I would now commend your immortal souls to him, who formerly committed them to me, expecting the day, when I must meet you again before him, who is the Judge of the quick and the dead. ... And let us all remember, and never forget our

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 226-7.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 229-35.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 235-6.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 236-40.

future solemn meeting, on that great day of the Lord, the day of infallible decision, and of the everlasting and unalterable sentence.<sup>112</sup>

The immediate problem for Edwards after his dismissal was that he and his family had nowhere else to go, and so they remained awkwardly in Northampton for a year. Their relationship with the townspeople was filled with tension. Occasionally asked to preach to cover a vacancy, Edwards was eventually banned from doing so, even if it meant sometimes going without a preacher.<sup>113</sup> Further skirmishes followed, until Edwards eventually found it far more attractive to accept an invitation to pastor an English congregation at Stockbridge and to be a missionary to the Indians there.<sup>114</sup>

Even after his dismissal, the townspeople continued to search for someone to defend their position in writing, which led Solomon Williams to defend the views of his grandfather Solomon Stoddard against Edwards's criticisms in *The True State of the Question*, published in May, 1751. Edwards was living in Stockbridge by then but felt compelled to put the record straight in *Misrepresentations Corrected, and Truth Vindicated, In a Reply to the Rev. Solomon William's Book, Intituled, The True State of the Question concerning the Qualifications necessary to lawful Communion in the Christian Sacraments (1752)*.<sup>115</sup> He insisted that he had not required the "highest evidence a man can give of sincerity" but was only asking for credible evidence of real godliness as opposed to credible evidence of moral sincerity, which had been sufficient for Solomon Stoddard. Edwards stated that he had repeatedly said it was impossible to judge people's hearts and that the church could deal only in probabilities in evaluating visible sainthood. Furthermore, he had explicitly said that some charity must be granted to people who had scruples about the evidence of their own godliness. He was not requiring the highest evidence of godliness; all he was demanding was some believable evidence that a candidate was truly godly.<sup>116</sup> While Edwards had not required a narrative of a conversion experience, he had required that would-be communicants report their belief that God was working grace within them, with a concomitant intention to live a life of holiness.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 240-1.

<sup>113</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to John Erskine," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 364.

<sup>114</sup> To test the situation he left for Stockbridge in January and stayed until early spring, preaching to both whites and Indians and securing formal invitation to settle there. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 364.

<sup>115</sup> Edwards never spoke out again on the issue, but others did in an exchange of publications that lasted into the nineteenth century. Hall, "Editor's Introduction," 18.

<sup>116</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Misrepresentations Corrected, and Truth Vindicated, In a Reply to the Rev. Solomon William's Book, Intituled, The True State of the Question concerning the Qualifications necessary to lawful Communion in the Christian Sacraments (1752)*, in *Jonathan Edwards Ecclesiastical Writings*, 354-60.

## IX CONCLUSION

One person's authority is another person's alien. In attempting to exercise what he regarded as his God given authority, Edwards came into conflict with his own Northampton congregation, who rejected his notion of authority as inimical to their situation. Specifically, the contest centred on the "Halfway Covenant" controversy, where Edwards opposed Stoddard's inclusive attitude to communion and insisted on excluding the nominal and unconverted. This clash of authorities led ultimately to Edwards's dismissal from the church and his exile from Northampton, another factor in the process of his self-fashioning.

While the outcome of this conflict seems like a defeat for Edwards, it serves to illustrate just how far the development of his persona had come. In these final years of his ministry, despite the intense and insurmountable antagonism of his church, the very people who had the power of terminating his employment, Edwards projected a character of indomitable fortitude. This character had been shaped not only by his experiences and popular status, but also by an irrepressible sense of his inherent authority as a minister and established leader, not just of Northampton but on a much greater scale. This was something more than just a right to be heard; it was more of a compulsion to be heeded. No longer seeking peer approbation, he adopted a position of distantiation from his people as a necessary mechanism for the exercise of his felt mandate. In doing so, his persona was concretized into something more than a philosophical debater or revivalist apologist. Now, he saw himself as a genuine force for truth and righteousness, a force which in the short term must be recognised and in the long run would be vindicated.

This aspect of his persona was established in the crisis of conflict, where his assertion of authority was resisted as alien to the resident constituency. Yet he was certain of his position as theological and ecclesial leader beyond the capacity of the Northampton community to appreciate and so he sought a wider audience. His obsession for recording and being recorded was obvious, as he insisted on a wide broadcasting of his situation and views. No longer merely the comfortable *litterateur*, he was now an active and aggressive leader. Though he was politically defeated, Edwards demonstrated in this conflict the full development of his fully defined persona, a persona grounded in his concept of divine sovereignty and authority, crafted through formative experiences of engaging various alien forces, and now clearly defined and expressed in his local arena. Pointedly, he finished on a note of demanding his

position be broadcast globally, if not in the pulpit then at least in publications, a clear sign of where and what he believed himself to be. This was the expression of a bigger self than he had ever been before.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDWARDS'S LITERARY PERSONA

#### I INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters have concentrated on delineating the various themes and issues which dominated Edwards's thought: the articulation of the sovereignty of God and the utter insufficiency of humanity; the defence of orthodoxy against various external alien isms; the reasoned defence of revivalism; and the conflict within his own congregation. This chapter turns from the "what" of his thought to the "how" of his writing. At all times, Edwards realized that the impact of his beliefs would be rendered most powerful through the medium of writing. Hence Edwards the writer was as important as Edwards the pastor – indeed, for Edwards, writing was a part of pasturing. But more significantly for this thesis, was a key agent in the formulation of his public persona. This chapter focuses on this literary aspect of Edwards, not as a study of his literary talents *per se*, but as a study of his use of literature as a deliberate tool in the crafting of his persona.<sup>1</sup>

The development of Edwards's persona can be traced through an analysis of his writings both chronologically and categorically. His early writings (1720s to early 1730s) show that he was intent on creating a literary technique to suit his ends; the work of his middle career (mid-late 1730s) exemplifies a growing mastery of this technique; and his later writings (from 1740 on) represent a mature expression of this technique as he left an enduring literary corpus which has had a profound impact well beyond his personal ministry. Within this chronological development, however, there are various nuances which can be seen in different categories of writing. The more reflective tone of his private personal writings, his Resolutions and Diary, provides an interesting contrast with his very deliberate quasi-public works, his Miscellanies, Letters and Personal Narrative, which were intentionally written to test the waters of a limited public response before he committed himself to significant public compositions on a wide scale. These works reveal a self-conscious use of language, especially when compared with the raw material in his purely private writings. As time went by, it was his public writings, his Sermons, Discourses and Treatises, that came to dominate and they represent the mature expression of his persona. This chapter will proceed on the basis of examining Edwards's private, quasi-public and public writings on his major themes of the sovereignty of God, the

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<sup>1</sup> In the field of literature, Stephen Greenblatt states that self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 9.

utter insufficiency of humanity, his new sense, and the Divine beauty and excellency, within an overall chronological development.

## II LITERARY PHILOSOPHY

Right from the beginning of his career, Edwards was acutely conscious of his potential as a shaper of public opinion and belief. In this early stage, he set out a personal discipline for writing which he would craft into a sophisticated technique throughout his career. His “Cover-Leaf Memoranda” of 1723-1726<sup>2</sup> contains a set of rules of composition which were designed to optimize the reception of his work by as wide an audience as possible.<sup>3</sup> This early piece constitutes the formulation of a literary philosophy and serves well to illustrate his strategy to shape his writings around three key considerations: structure, tone and receptivity.

Edwards resolved early to adopt a structure based on “logic and rational exposition,”<sup>4</sup> aimed squarely at persuading his readership to accept and adopt his ideas. His writings should, he thought, always start with a stark “unadorned proposition” supported by “clear definitions” and “axiomatic corollaries.” Such postulations should be used “at the beginning” of the whole work and at pivotal stages of the work, “such as chapters and sections.” The idea was to make it natural to accept his thoughts and virtually impossible to negate them. The writing should then proceed by such rhetorical devices as “question and answer dialogue,” with everything delivered in a “clear orderly structure” that would be effectively incontrovertible.

Of great concern to Edwards in his embryonic literary method was the matter of tone, that is, the attitude of the writer to his reader or, perhaps more accurately, how his attitude to his reader would be perceived. It was, he said, important to gain readers “not just to silence them.” Thus he should do everything possible to ensure he did not offend or alienate readers and he should take all steps possible to get them on side right from the beginning. He should avoid making “disputable” claims and should focus in the early stages on the things known to his readers before taking them into more arcane areas. Acceptance of his ideas should derive from the clarity and force of the ideas themselves rather than exaggerated statements such as

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “*Natural Philosophy Cover-Leaf Memoranda*,” in Wallace E. Anderson, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 6 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1980), 192-5.

<sup>3</sup> All five memoranda on the Side i of the leaf were written between late 1723 and 1726. Nos. 7-14 on side ii appear to have been written in 1724, just before or during the early months of Edwards’s Yale tutorship. Nos. 17-21 appear to have been written in 1726, probably soon after the end of Jonathan Edwards’s Yale tutorship. Wallace E. Anderson, *Jonathan Edwards Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, 192 n3, 193 n5, 194 n7.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson H. Kimnach, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 10 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), 197.

“it’s certain that” or “it’s undeniable”. There should be a compliance with the “reader’s weakness,” as detailed in the six rules of the Ladies’ Library Vol. 1.<sup>5</sup> Such rules included “establishing and maintaining a clear focus of topic” with “no extraneous issues encroaching,” an exhaustive treatment of the topic in a “clear and orderly manner” proceeding from “the more simple to the more complex,” and “limiting judgments to those conclusions which do not exceed the bounds of clear proof.” But of all his deliberations on tone, perhaps the most dear to him was the matter of “modesty in his composition.”<sup>6</sup> He insisted that modesty should be the hallmark of his writing, especially warranted because of his “colonial context” and his “youth.” He should not “make reference to matters of style” and method, lest this would cast him in a “pretentious” light. He should minimise his “art,” his references to his learning, or anything else that might put a gulf between him and his reader. While he insisted that such modesty should be natural and decent, it is clear that it was in reality an affected modesty, with the stated intention of enhancing the reception of his work.

Indeed it was the receptivity of his writing that dominated his literary philosophy. If the use of scripture in support of his argument would be likely to disaffect readers, he would “reduce it to no more than would be reasonably accepted.” If mathematical evidence were to be evinced, he would “not claim mathematical expertise” but present it merely for “scientific consideration.” If he were to present metaphysical propositions, he would do so “by way of questions” only, and would conceal his own “determinations” on the subject. He would “avoid extraordinary topics in the early stages,” so the readers would be “contented to confirm what they already knew,” before leading them into more new areas of thinking and so prepare them for new beliefs. As a publishing strategy, he would “publish small” at first before proceeding to greater experiments. That is, he would publish locally before in London and he would “write letters before major works” – all to ensure a gradually developed positive reception of his works and ideas. So it was that, right from the outset, Edwards strategically set out to shape his literary persona in a direction that, while starting with simple, direct personal writings, would culminate in his later, mature public treatises.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Ladies’ Library: Written by a Lady* (2 vols., London, 1714) was published by Sir Richard Steele. Edwards’s reference is probably to the third edition of this work (1722). In the chapter “On Ignorance” (Vol. 1, pp. 323-25), Steele sets forth six rules for the conduct of inquiry and the governance of judgment. Ibid., 193-4 n6.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards admonishes himself to be modest in numbers 4, 6, 8, 9 and 12, 16, 18, 20 and 21. His literary modesty is a stylistic strategy; moreover, it shows that Edwards was conscious of the subtlety requisite to the success of such a ploy. Wilson Henry Kimnach, *The Literary Techniques of Jonathan Edwards* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1971), 260-1. Pro Quest Dissertations and Theses (accessed April 20, 2011).



### III EARLY WRITINGS

#### (a) *Diary*

In Edwards's early writings can be detected the first steps towards mastering this craft. In his personal *Diary* (1722-1725), he was already showing some signs of implementing his rules of composition, even though this was not a work designed for publication.<sup>7</sup> Naturally, in a diary form, the writer is more intent on expressing his evolving thoughts than in leading the reader (ostensibly none other than himself). So it is that, throughout the *Diary*, the emphasis is on personal musing rather than didactic rhetoric. The language used indicates a mind intent on capturing the majestic sovereignty of God and the utter dependency and inability of humanity, in a richly imagistic way. It thus vacillates between exulting in God's excellency (December 22, 1722, January 8, 1722-23, June 1, 1723, June 21, 1723) and wallowing in self-flagellating melancholy (January 2, 1722-23, January 5, 1722-23, January 14, 1722-23, February 23, 1723, May 1, 1723). The language is descriptively imagistic not polemically persuasive. Yet even in these early personal writings, there is evidence of the ordered structure that was to mark his later work. In the entry of December 18, 1722, there is no sense of developed argument, no use of rhetorical devices, no question and answer dialogue and the tone is reflective rather than controlling. However, the structural rule of beginning with simple stark propositions leading to axiomatic corollaries ending in a simple judgment is evident. The entry of December 24, 1722 illustrates the sense of propositional orderliness that he sought to master. A structured renewal of covenant in the January 12, 1723 entry, recounts events in an orderly way, using rhetorical question and answer leading to a stark judgment.<sup>8</sup> The logical presentation of incontrovertible thoughts was a system that Edwards clearly found conducive at a very early stage. But what is perhaps more interesting here is the noticeable change that occurred in his *Diary* in 1723-25. He now became progressively more concerned with how his writing would be received; the personal musing of 1722 gave way to a greater emphasis on receptivity in 1724. Entries note with increasing frequency the need to consider people's reactions to what he does and says. On December 12, 1723, he noted the need to avoid giving offence when chastising others; on February 23, 1724, he cautioned

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<sup>7</sup> Edwards began his *Diary* in late 1722, shortly after his *Resolutions*. The original manuscripts do not exist. With nine entries from 1722, twenty-five from 1724, seven from 1725, and six spanning the years 1726-1735. 1723 is the most represented year with entries on 103 days.

Kenneth P. Minkema, "Personal Writings," in Stephen J. Stein, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, (Cambridge Collections Online: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41 (accessed August 11, 2009), DOI:10.1017/CCOLO521852900.003.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Edwards. "Diary" in George S. Claghorn, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 16 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 762-3.

himself against “transcending the bonds of verity;” on November 10, 1724 he wrote of considering the “good opinion of myself with others.” The need to present himself as acceptable to the public was an increasingly frequent topic of his private consideration.

(b) *Early Miscellanies*

Edwards’s early semi-public writings may be represented by a selection of the *Miscellanies* from 1722-1729.<sup>9</sup> While originally composed as private pieces, the *Miscellanies* were made available to Edwards’s colleagues and students to read and study, thus giving them a quasi-public status analogous to letters.<sup>10</sup> More overtly than the *Diary*, these works illustrate the structural processes and argumentation methods adopted by Edwards for his public purposes. Since many of the tenets of literary composition detailed in the “Cover-Leaf Memoranda” are manifest in these writings, it seems that they were a more conscious effort to implement those rules of composition. Of particular note is the use of sustained syllogistic argument based on simple premises and axiomatic corollaries and the way in which Edwards leads his reader to the incontrovertible conclusions he requires.

In *Miscellanies* 208-210, a series of short pieces on the Glory of God is prefaced by a simple proposition (“God loves his creatures”), supported by equally simple corollaries (“so that he really loves the being honoured by them, as all love to be well thought of by those they love”), leading to a more complex but logically acceptable conclusion (“Therefore we are to seek the glory of God as that which is a thing really pleasing to him”). This conclusion is in turn followed by a number of consequential phrases such as “for this reason” and “therefore”: all geared to leading the reader into an acceptance of the plain reasonability of the content.<sup>11</sup> A similar syllogistic method is used in *Miscellany* 247, which begins with a simple definitional proposition (“For God to glorify himself is to discover himself in his works”), followed by an expanded yet still simple corollary in the second paragraph (“the very phrase ‘the glory’ seems naturally to signify [this]”), and the simple conclusion (“so that the glory of

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<sup>9</sup> Edwards’s *Miscellanies* form an intellectual diary that is unsurpassable in its length, breadth of content, or depth of thought. The *Miscellanies* comprise 1500 mini-essays on all manner of theological and philosophical subjects. He made his first entry in 1722 and his final entry in 1758 in the last year of his life. For thirty-five years these notebooks chart his intellectual development by preserving and revealing the genesis and incubation of his most characteristic ideas prior to their incorporation into his sermons and treatises.

Thomas A Schafer, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500), The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 13 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Ava Chamberlain, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 501-832), The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 18 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Shafer, *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500), 342.

God is the shining forth of his perfections”) derived from this brief unadorned exposition.<sup>12</sup> The use of scripture is here limited to illustration, not used as proof, as indicated in the “Cover-Leaf Memoranda,” as it is also in *Miscellany* 358, where popular scripture is used as a starting point only to introduce some “exceeding plain” discussion of God’s absolute goodness.<sup>13</sup>

The slightly later *Miscellany* 490 on the Sovereignty of God exhibits a more complex reasoning argument. Here, Edwards juxtaposes two contrary viewpoints, the one negating God’s absolute sovereignty and the other supporting it. However, this is no balanced exposition; rather, it is clearly designed to lead to one incontrovertible conclusion and its use of a leading technique is demonstrative of Edwards’s writing craft. Edwards commences by stating the case against God’s determinative sovereignty, based essentially on the unacceptability of the notion that God’s benevolence could lead him to do anything “injurious to the creature,” which is an ineluctible outcome of pre-determination to eternal damnation. This case is presented as a plainly attractive, reasonable – and readily acceptable – position.<sup>14</sup> Thus it is a position which would find initial acceptance with the readership. This complies with the dictum that an argument should ensure that the reader is kept on side from the outset. However, Edwards then proceeds from this “reasonable” position to that which is “more reasonable,” namely, the even less acceptable notion of salvation/damnation determined by blind chance instead of divine wisdom. It is far better to have ultimate destiny in the hands of a just and wise God than for it to be the result of “causes that are blind, undesigning and involuntary ... (for) chance judges not of better or worse.”<sup>15</sup> The structure of this work is designed carefully to convince the reader of an altered belief. The first case is that of the comfortable and easily accepted idea of God’s benign benevolence (as understood by fallible human reasoning), but this is superseded by the more cogent argument of God’s justice based on divine wisdom.

*Miscellany* 108 on the Excellency of Christ is an early example of Edwards’s complex yet persuasive literary technique. As per the “Cover-Leaf Memoranda,” it is a case of reasoned argumentation that begins with the simple positing of a familiar and unobjectionable concrete situation that leads into a more exalted – but equally incontrovertible – conclusion. The argument starts with a simple reference to the “analogy” or “consent” that exists between

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 533-4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 534.

concrete forms and human affections. “When we behold a beautiful body, a lovely proportion, ... we are charmed with it; not under the notion of a corporeal, but a mental beauty.”<sup>16</sup> A statue with the same features would not evoke such affections: this is the “analogy” that exists between the corporeal and the affective. From here, he moves on to the analogy between other corporeal elements (skies, trees, fields, flowers) and “spiritual excellencies,” which allows a mental ascent into higher meditation. In a more complex argument than usual, he then proceeds to a third level of such analogy, namely, that of the creative Son of God and his self-communication, which is made “properly only to spirits.”<sup>17</sup> In total, an impressive structure of three-fold analogy is used: the corporeal /affective analogy between loved ones and their “airs;” the corporeal/spiritual analogy between nature and spiritual excellencies; and the abstract/spiritual analogy between the creator Son of God and his self-communicated yet properly spiritual image. The striking feature of this work is the parallelism of its component parts that leads gradually to increasingly less concrete and more profound concepts. It is as though Edwards is leading his readers in a process of intellectual ascent in order to attain their intellectual assent. Even at this early stage of his career, there was emerging a growing consciousness of his role in leading people to new belief.

(c) *Public Lecture*

Edwards’s first published work was printed as *God Glorified in the Work of Redemption, by the Greatness of Man’s Dependence upon Him, in the Whole of It* (1731).<sup>18</sup> This work is stylistically impressive. Edwards plays ingeniously upon the prepositions “of”, “by”, “through” and “in” to dramatize the completeness of man’s dependence.<sup>19</sup> It typified so much of what Edwards sought to achieve by means of his literary technique. Structurally, it followed the typical homiletic form of a brief scriptural introduction, two key doctrinal sections and a brief application,<sup>20</sup> but in doing so, it followed strictly the tenets of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 278-9.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in Mark Valerie, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1730 – 1733*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 17 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999), 200-16.

<sup>19</sup> *God Glorified* is an important sermon because it is the second instalment, after the *Quaestio*, of Edwards’s anti-Arminian argument validating man’s absolute helplessness before a sovereign God. Wilson H. Kimmach, “Edwards as Preacher,” in Stephen J. Stein, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (Cambridge Collections Online: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 111, (accessed August 10, 2009). DOI:10.1017/CCOLO521852900.006.

<sup>20</sup> The sermon form inherited by Edwards dramatized the mediation of the divine in its very formal structure. As preached (or written) it moves systematically from the divine to the human, but at each stage places the subject in the divine context ... represented by the words of scripture ... which are used at key points throughout the sermon and are known as “scripture proofs.” Ibid., 105.

composition outlined in the “Cover-Leaf Memoranda.” The doctrinal section – the bulk of the sermon – immediately sets out two stark, simple, unadorned propositions:

I. That there is an absolute and universal dependence of the redeemed on God for all their good.

II. That God hereby is exalted and glorified in the work of redemption.<sup>21</sup>

Further, such postulations are provided at the beginning of each section and each subsection, thus keeping the focus sharp in its repetitive simplicity. Everything is delivered in a clear orderly way that is effectively impossible to argue with at any single point, thus making for a cumulative effect of acceptance. The tone of the writing is significant. The simplicity and plainness of language is in stark contrast with the richly imagistic description of his personal *Diary*. Instead, there is a measured lack of artistry, there is no alienating controversy of thought or provocative expression, just simple factual statements within a clearly logical order. In place of the colourful epithets of the *Diary* is a set of simple prepositional hooks: *in, by, through* and *of Christ/ God*.<sup>22</sup>

All the good that men have is in and through Christ ... 'tis through Christ that we have righteousness; ... 'tis by being in him that we are justified; ... 'Tis by Christ that we have sanctification: we have in him true excellency of heart; ... 'Tis by Christ that we have redemption ... Thus we have all our good by Christ who is God.”<sup>23</sup> The redeemed have all their good of God. Because 'Tis of God ... that we have our Redeemer ... he is the gift of God to us. As it is God that gives that provides and gives the Redeemer to buy salvation for us, so it is of God that salvation is bought. 'Tis of God that Christ becomes ours ... 'Tis of God that we receive faith to close with him ... 'Tis of God that we actually do receive all the benefits that Christ has purchased. ... 'Tis of God that we have the holy Scriptures ... 'Tis of God that we have ordinances, etc. etc.<sup>24</sup>

Such repetition and simplicity serve to achieve acceptance and retention by the listener/reader by means of an accumulation of acceptable facts. Rhetorical devices such as juxtaposition for contrast and comparison are evident. As God's grace is elevated, so human dependence is accentuated. As human dependence is accentuated, so God's power is elevated.<sup>25</sup> This leads

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<sup>21</sup> Edwards, “God Glorified in Man's Dependence,” 202.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 202-10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 202-3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 204-5.

to a statement of acknowledgement of the absolute grace and power of God and the corresponding absolute dependence of humanity on God for grace and power.<sup>26</sup> True to his stated literary philosophy, there is no exaggerated claim of certainty; the clarity and force of the ideas themselves serve to ensure their acceptance. Once he establishes the incontrovertibility of absolute dependence in the dominant doctrinal section, he proceeds in the same unadorned manner, the same “common sense” approach, to show that the greater the dependence, the greater the notice taken of the higher attributes.<sup>27</sup> The rhetorical comparison technique is maintained, showing that God’s glory is enhanced by comparison with human dependency: “However great and glorious the creature apprehends God to be, yet if he be not sensible of the difference between God and him, so as to see that God’s glory is great compared with his own, he will not be disposed to give God the glory due to his name.”<sup>28</sup> Simply put, God warrants our undivided awe and respect.<sup>29</sup> The brief “Use” section that concludes the sermon is similarly coherent in its structure, with four simple (yet essentially still doctrinal rather than practical) clauses underlining the wisdom of God in redemption, the error of doctrines which oppose absolute dependency, the sensibleness of faith, and an exhortation to exalt God alone.<sup>30</sup>

It was clearly the acceptability of this first published sermon that most concerned Edwards. He refrained from anything that might smack of pretentiousness or art or erudition that would put a gulf between him and his readers. His structure was clear and logical; his language was simple and unadorned; his argument was reasonable not emotive; his conclusions were orthodox and inoffensive. Even his treasured modesty in writing was highlighted – not by himself (as this would have been pretentious indeed), but by his two close associates Prince and Cooper who penned the Preface to the Reader. “It was with no small difficulty that the author’s youth and modesty were prevailed on to let him appear a preacher in our public lecture, and afterwards to give us a copy of his discourse, at the desire of divers, ministers and others, who heard it.”<sup>31</sup> Yet despite his reluctance to project himself, he worked assiduously to ensure that the public reception of the work was as he wanted it. That this small but carefully crafted sermon was published locally in Boston is another element in his

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 212-14.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 214.

overall strategy of publishing locally before in London and publishing small pieces before attempting major works.

In summary, Edwards's early writings may be seen as his initial attempts to develop a cogent literary technique that would serve him well in establishing his public profile. He detailed such a strategy in the "Cover-Leaf Memoranda" of 1723-1726 and his other writings of the period show the varying degrees to which he managed to implement the process. His private writing in the *Diary* was probably an attempt to find himself rather than trying to express himself, yet even this private work showed glimpses of the structured and tidy mind that would develop more deliberately in the more public works. But as the works became more public, so Edwards's effort to control his public profile became more intentional and strategic. The *Miscellanies* had a limited and controlled public exposure among students and colleagues and in such a relatively safe environment, Edwards more consciously worked on the structural elements of composition designed to lead readers to the new beliefs that Edwards himself had formulated. By the time he came to his first deliberate publication in *God Glorified in Man's Dependence* in 1731, he had already developed a carefully crafted structure, but now added to that an equally crafted tone of leading the readers to where he wanted them to be. This tone had changed from the reflective mood of the rich imagery in the private writing to a more consciously didactic style which sought to avoid alienation while using the rhetorical techniques of measured persuasion. His self-understanding as a shaper of public beliefs was emerging. The persona needed to become an effective shaper of public beliefs was now being forged by means of this literary tool that he had designed.

#### **IV MIDDLE CAREER**

As Edwards's career progressed, his writings became more consciously public exposition. The fact that his *Diary* ceased at 1725 is one indication of this. More and more he devoted his writing to letters, sermons and discourses. While the letters were generally personal, they were also semi-public, being written often to people of social prominence, in either ministry or publishing or both. A major correspondent of Edwards was the Reverend Benjamin Colman, the influential Boston minister who was to become something of a sponsor of the younger Edwards. The letters to Colman provide further insights into the way in which Edwards used his writing to further his public profile and to shape his public reception. On the other hand, the discourses were more formal works, designed to give clear and persuasive expression to his theological views which he sought to impress on the broader public to

whom they were addressed. A small but representative selection of letters and discourses from the 1730s will demonstrate this development.

(a) *Letters*

The most significant letter to Benjamin Colman was that of May 30, 1735.<sup>32</sup> The letter was written to give an account of the recent revivals that had occurred in Northampton during 1734-35. Colman abridged the letter for publication in Boston in 1736 and sent copies to Isaac Watts and John Guyse in London, who requested the full text of the letter and permission to edit and print it. This London interest led to the eventual publication of Edwards's letter as *A Faithful Narrative* (1737), which established his reputation abroad, a key element in his strategy. While the content of this letter has been treated elsewhere (see chapter 5), it is the style of the writing that is of interest here.

The structure of the letter is typical of Edwards: a brief introduction, two clear detailed sections, and a summary conclusion. By way of introduction, Edwards refers to his preaching on Sabbath-keeping among the youth and the duties of parents to govern their families. To his delight, "the young people declared themselves convinced by what they had heard" and so a renewal of social goodwill and religious fervour was generated.<sup>33</sup> The bulk of the letter comprises two parts: a narrative review of the spread of the revival followed by an account of the nature of the revival experiences. In both sections, what is striking is the clarity and cumulative force created by the sheer simplicity of the narrative. True to his principles of composition, he presents a plain, unadorned account of the extent and nature of the revivals in the town and neighbouring areas. Starting locally, the account simply and logically lists the spread of the renewal to the region – it is all so easy to follow. The treatment of the nature of the revival experiences is similarly simple in its presentation. A few individual examples are simplistically described, with no embellishment or interpretation of the incident, simply an eye witness description. The concluding summary cites the visit of two external ministers who had come to evaluate the phenomenon and had left convinced of its authenticity.<sup>34</sup> By this simple narrative account with its appeal to known independent witnesses, Edwards created an air of reliability and acceptability of his account.

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<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Reverend Benjamin Colman, May 30, 1735," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 48-58.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.



The tone of the letter is clearly meant to impress with its credibility and ready acceptability. In particular, Edwards was no doubt keen to overcome any distrust of the incident, though he barely ever mentioned this concern in the letter. There is a conspicuous lack of emotive language; there are no extravagant claims; there is merely a straightforward narrative of observed facts. This emphasis on factuality based on an accumulation of “ordinary” details presents the subject as a credible phenomenon and, more significantly, presents the writer as a creditable source. Yet there is a subtlety in the composition. The section on the extent of revival relies heavily on the repetition of simple and acceptable phrases. In particular, Edwards described the revival somewhat mildly in terms of “a concern”: “a concern about the great things of religion ... a deep concern about their salvation ... a great degree of concern about their souls ....” This emerging concern was typically accompanied by a sense of being “seized”: “all seemed to be seized with a deep concern ... the people in New Hadley seemed to be seized with a deep concern ... the whole town seemed to be seized at once ... the worst person seemed to be suddenly seized ... the rude debauched young people were suddenly seized with a concern ....”<sup>35</sup> There were no graphic details, simply a listing of an ever-increasing number of locations and incidents. When taken all together, the listing of many known local places coupled with the simple and mild references to a concern about religion, the plain narrative in calm unemotional language, the lack of any exaggerated claims – this all gives an air of widespread commonness, a sense of the ordinary to allay any possible suspicions about enthusiastic fanaticism. Yet the notion of an ever-present higher hand, a concept dear to Edwards, is sustained by the constant refrain of being seized.

The other point of note is Edwards’s insistence on a strategic modesty which will both endear him to his readers and give him an air of reasonable acceptability. The accounts of the revival experiences are presented in such a calm under-stated way (even when dealing with extraordinary ecstatic experiences) that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Edwards was deliberately trying to de-sensationalize the phenomenon. In the account of three pious young persons who had swooned when contemplating the dying love of Christ, he added the rider “though ’tis probable the fainting of the two latter was much promoted by the fainting of the first.”<sup>36</sup> His account of the ecstatic experience of a pious woman in the town was tempered by observations that she was “a very modest bashful person” who, while being “in an unusual

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 49-52.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 53.

extraordinary frame” was none the less “perfectly sober and in the exercise of her reason.”<sup>37</sup> Edwards made no exaggerated claims, he took no credit for revival, he at all times presented himself and his observations as appropriate for a reasonable man. He would be seen as no iconoclast: “There is no new way of worship affected.”<sup>38</sup> He would describe but not advocate the revival phenomena: “They are always taught not to lay the weight of their hopes on such things.”<sup>39</sup> As his parting words to Colman, he declined to make any interpretation or evaluation. “I forbear to make reflections, or to guess what God is about to do; I leave this to you.” In all his writing, he preserved this stance of modesty, lest he lose ready acceptance.<sup>40</sup> The entire letter to Colman is typified by the elements of structural simplicity and clarity, repetitive yet understated and unemotional language, a winsome modesty, all of which combine to produce an account which is factual, acceptable and respectable, while still creating the desired impression on the reader. It is little wonder that this publication did much to enhance the standing of Edwards on both sides of the Atlantic and helped shape his own self-image as a reasonable apologist of revival.

(b) *Sermons*

While the letter to Colman and its associated *Faithful Narrative* typified the modest plain-speaking narrator that Edwards wanted to project, the enhanced reputation he thus acquired no doubt gave him greater self-confidence. A pivotal turning point in his writing occurred at this juncture with a far more assertive authority becoming apparent in his discourses. Edwards furthered his reputation during the late 1730s by publishing his collection of pastoral sermons that had reputedly precipitated the 1734-35 frontier revival in *Discourses on Various Important Subjects* (1738). In this series, he published his own homiletical memorial in the preface where he recalls what led to its five pieces.<sup>41</sup> The first four Discourses – *Justification by Faith Alone*, *Pressing into the Kingdom of God*, *Ruth’s Resolution*, and *The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners* - were delivered at the time of “the late wonderful work of God’s power and grace” and were published “on the earnest desire of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>40</sup> This modesty before Colman is even more pronounced in a later letter where he rejected the idea that he had been critical of Colman’s editorial work. “I always looked upon it an honor too great for me, for you to be at the trouble to draw an extract of my letter to publish to the world ... I willingly submit it to (Watts and Guyse’s) correction.”

“Letter To the Reverend Benjamin Colman, May 19, 1737,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 69-70.

<sup>41</sup> M X Lesser, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1734-1738*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 19 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), 793-8.

those to whom they were preached;” the last, *The Excellency of Christ*, was delivered somewhat later and was added as “proper to succeed those things that were to show the necessity of salvation.”<sup>42</sup>

The *Discourses on Various Important Subjects* was published in 1738 – significantly by Edwards himself rather than by a sponsor, in response to requests from parishioners and others who had heard them in their original delivery. The addition of the final piece, *The Excellency of Christ*, was Edwards’s attempt to balance the content.<sup>43</sup> However, in preparing them for print, Edwards re-worked them and explicitly “designed (them) for the press.”<sup>44</sup> The resultant literary composition shows a clear and defining development in his self-understanding of his public role, with a radical stylistic evolution from simple, modest home-spun narrative to elaborate, authoritative theologising. His growing understanding of his public role now began to shape the very person that Edwards saw himself to be.

In the “Preface to Discourses,” Edwards presented an overt statement on the style of his composition, something which he had warned against doing in his earlier “Cover-Leaf Memoranda.” In light of his insistence on simple unadorned language and homely narrative in his earlier compositional guidelines, the most notable element of this preface is its defence of complex composition. Edwards rejected criticism of his pet topic of justification by faith as being “too much encumbered with speculative niceties,” stressing instead the need of complex unfolding of the inherent “mysteries” in such lofty doctrines.

The great doctrines of Christianity, ... though they contain something that is easy, yet they also contain great mysteries ... but ’tis unreasonable to expect that this progress (in the knowledge of them) should be made, in the knowledge of things that are high and mysterious, without accurate distinction, and close application of thought ... that this doctrine of the justification of a sinner by a Mediator, should be without mysteries.<sup>45</sup>

In addressing the actual sermons, Edwards insisted that they had had but little added to them, that they “now appear in that very plain and unpolished dress, in which they were first prepared and delivered,” and that they were examples of “a very plain, unfashionable way of preaching,” he eschewed “the elegance of language, and excellency of style” that typified

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<sup>42</sup> Edwards dated the MS of the first of these November 1734; the second, February 1735; the third, April 1735; and the fifth, August 1736. The fourth manuscript lacks a first leaf, and therefore the date, but an analysis of its ink and paper places *The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners* in May 1735. Ibid., 4 n3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 797.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 794.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 795-6.

other contemporary preaching.<sup>46</sup> However, despite such protestation, as will be seen in the following analysis of “The Excellency of Christ,” his whole approach to the discourses was anything but plain and certainly did contain a notable elegance of language and sophistication of style.

Not so explicit, but of equal import, is the hint of abandoning the apparently neutral stance of a modest non-judgmental observer who would offer no conclusions but would leave such to the reader. In the earlier accounts of the revivals in Northampton, he had offered a simple listing of locales and incidents involving a number of individual conversion experiences. He had not deigned to offer any speculative interpretation of these events, but consistently downplayed the spectacular within them. Now, at the outset of the preface, the revival was expressed as “the late work of God in this place ... a remarkable testimony of God’s approbation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, here asserted and vindicated.”<sup>47</sup> The mundane description of the revival has been replaced with a theological interpretation of a grand divine work. It is no longer the testimony of two visiting ministers, but the very divinity of the origin of the work itself that vindicates Edwards’s doctrinal position. This is a significant shift in Edwards’s tone, a shift that marks the emergence of a more assertively self-confident authority, no longer one who appreciates an opportunity to be read, but one who claims a right to be heard.

The excellency of Christ was a topic dear to Edwards since his youth. The editor M. X. Lesser has made some insightful observations on Edwards’s preparation of this piece for publication. He notes that the printed version is one fifth longer than the manuscript version: “from manuscript to print, Edwards adds to the text in countless ways.”<sup>48</sup> He also notes that its placement in the volume – immediately following the imprecatory sermon “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners,” a sermon composed sixteen months earlier than “The Excellency of Christ” – allows Edwards to “insinuate upon his readers as he could not upon his listeners, the central paradox of his ministry, that there is life after death through Christ.”<sup>49</sup> It is this sort of preparation for publication that allowed Edwards to emphasise the paradox that dominates the sermon and it is in the working out of such paradox that his sophisticated artistry becomes apparent.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 797.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 795.

<sup>48</sup> M. X. Lesser, “Editor’s Introduction to ‘The Excellency of Christ,’” in *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1734-1738*, 562.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 560.

The discourse itself hinges on an elaborate treatment of a dominant paradox: Christ as Lamb and Christ as Lion, based on Revelation 5:5-6.<sup>50</sup> Structurally, it follows the standard format of brief Introduction, followed by two Doctrine segments, concluded with an Application. It is ordered, logical and comprehensive in its treatment, being based on two doctrinal propositions supporting the overall thesis that “there is an admirable conjunction of divine excellencies in Jesus Christ.” It consistently and exhaustively draws out the implications of divine excellency through a detailed analysis of the paradoxical aspects of the strength and majesty of Christ as Lion and the meekness and patience of Christ as Lamb. The two basic propositions focus on the conjoint diversity of such attributes in both the person and the works of Christ.<sup>51</sup> However, this overall plan is not so simple in its execution. While there are just two basic propositions, the treatment breaks down into numerous sections within these propositions and even more sub-sections within the sections. The first proposition contains three major sections incorporating ten sub-sections; the second proposition contains five major sections incorporating eleven sub-sections. Each sub-section deals with a self-contained paradox, derived from the central paradoxes of the guiding propositions but having at best a tenuous connection with the others. Throughout the discourse, Edwards makes use of a sophisticated symmetrical juxtaposition of paradoxical attributes. This apparent determination to draw out as many paradoxical strands as possible seems at times an artistic contrivance rather than a discursive necessity. The result is a complex, multi-layered discourse which would clearly test the intellectual capacity of most readers – let alone the retentive capacity of any listeners. Its structure thus suggests a greater concern with philosophical argument than with homiletic impact: the mundane narrative of earlier works has changed into an elaborate discourse for intellectual absorption.

The tone of the discourse is the element that most marks the development in Edwards. His attitude to the readers is now one of didactic authority not humble reporter. Despite his claim of “plain preaching” and his stated aversion to “elegance of language,” the language used in this discourse belies a learned eloquent composer who is now prepared to express himself confidently with little regard for the commonness that he had prized so much previously. His practice had been to ensure the reader was not turned off by elevated language or contentious speculation at the outset. In “The Excellency of Christ,” the very first paragraphs are a learned and speculative explanation of visions and revelations of the apostle John and book-

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<sup>50</sup> The discourse is published as “The Excellency of Christ,” in *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1734-1738*, 563-94.

<sup>51</sup> Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” 565.

making techniques of antiquity.<sup>52</sup> The practice of starting with simple, concrete, easily palatable ideas is replaced with an immediate introduction and extended analysis of highly abstract speculative notions. The reader is met with statements such as “various divine perfections and excellencies that Christ is possessed of ... there do meet in Jesus Christ, infinite highness, and infinite condescension.”<sup>53</sup> These perfections are then discussed in graphic elaborate language to portray the heights of that highness and the depths of that condescension.

So great is he, that all men, all kings and princes, are as worms of the dust before him, all nations are as the drop of the bucket.

His condescension is sufficient to take a gracious notice of the most unworthy, sinful creatures, those that have no good deservings, and those that have infinite ill deservings.

If one worm be a little exalted above another, by having more dust, or a bigger dunghill, how much does he make of himself?

He is (Lord of all things) as he is God-man, and Mediator; and so his dominion is appointed, and given of the Father; and is by delegation from God, and he is as it were the Father’s viceregent.<sup>54</sup>

This sort of language infuses the whole discourse and is a far cry from the simple unadorned language of his earlier works. The homely illustrations of the understated narrator have evolved into the abstruse speculations of the oratorical metaphysician. As simple repetition gave way to complex paradox, so too unpolished language gave way to artistic elegance.

Tone is of course associated with reception. The change in tone from humility to authority suggests a change in how Edwards saw the reception of his writing. Earlier, he had been acutely conscious of the need to keep the reader on side to ensure a more favourable reception. Any sign of erudition, remoteness of language, or over-reliance on scriptural proofs was to be avoided, as all these things could lead to disaffection of the reader. It was also important to refrain from making any possibly contentious personal “determinations;” instead, the reader was to be led gently into the new beliefs that Edwards was communicating, with the clarity and simplicity of the argument itself carrying the day. “The Excellency of Christ” marks a departure from this strategy. Now, Edwards’s stance is that of a voice that does not ask to be heard; it expects to be heard and heeded. Therefore, he

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 563.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 565.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 566-70.

expects that readers will accept his more assertive doctrinal statements, that they will engage the metaphysical dimension of his argument, that they will be convinced by the weight of the scripture that he now parades, and that they will respond according to his directions.

The discourse starts with highly complex explanation, allusions and imagery. Its presentation is abstrusely philosophical not narratively simple and descriptive. Its argument is complex, multi-layered and disconnected. Throughout, he uses scripture not as stepping off points or as minor illustrations but as extensive proof texts of his paradoxical points – virtually every sub-section of the doctrinal argument is authenticated by the citation of numerous scriptural passages, not necessarily connected but impressive in their cumulative effect. Incantation, or the ritual invocation of the Word through the quotation of scripture passages at crucial points in the sermon, is one of the most ancient and even primitive of the preacher's rhetorical devices.<sup>55</sup>

There are numerous instances in Edwards's sermons where the sheer accumulation of Scripture passages obviously surpasses the requirements of scripture proof or even elucidation, though these needs may be met along the way. In such passages Edwards is employing the raw quantitative power of massed Scripture citations to substantiate his argument and make his auditory see him as one "who would *Speak as the Oracles of GOD.*"<sup>56</sup>

In the Application, which occupies fully one third of the whole discourse, there is no connection with the earthly ethical or social relations that featured so much in his earlier work among the congregation at Northampton. Rather, in keeping with the overall tenor of the discourse, the concluding section is really a continuation of the doctrinal argument. In an extensive series of pointed rhetorical questions, the readers are exhorted (and expected) to respond to their new understanding of the paradoxical "meeting of diverse excellencies in Christ" by accepting Christ as all-sufficient Saviour. Even the structure of the Application mirrors the doctrinal section, with more propositions and sub-sections in which the "poor, burdened, distressed soul" is challenged to accept the preceding reasoning and to come to Christ in the "sweet grace and kindness" of the Lamb of God and in his "glorious power and dominion" as Lion.<sup>57</sup> Thus the readers are exhorted "to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and

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<sup>55</sup> In Jonathan Edwards's day, "Holy Writ" still had much of its divine aura, its mystery and subliminal powers. Kimmach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, 210.

<sup>56</sup> Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (Boston, 1726), 103. Cited in *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, 210. Mather heartily endorsed "scriptural preaching."

<sup>57</sup> Edwards, "The Excellency of Christ," 584-7.

choose him for (their) friend and portion” and so ultimately to experience an undefined metaphysical “union with, and enjoyment of, God the Father.”<sup>58</sup>

From the very beginning – with its highly speculative and elegant tone – to the very end – with its equally abstract Applications – “The Excellency of Christ” projects Edwards as an eloquent declaratory voice of doctrinal propriety and power. Far from avoiding interpretation and personal determinations, he now commences from those very interpretations and progresses through assertive didactic philosophising to a theological conclusion, which is effectively a re-emphasising of his opening position. The modest plain-speaking narrator has evolved into a self-conscious and overt shaper of public belief. There is now a great confidence in his message and in his public reception. In this discourse, the more polished and formed persona has announced himself.

## V LATER WRITINGS

Edwards as a self-confident, self-conscious and intentional shaper of theological belief finds his mature expression in his later works. In these works, there is not just the sense that he has a message to offer, but more a sense that he has a conviction that he must bestow. This conviction emerged largely from his own personal experiential development, but in his later years, it was the conviction that seems to have shaped the person, certainly the literary person.<sup>59</sup> Two of his most well-known works are chosen here as representative literary examples of the way in which Edwards’s theological convictions served to shape the person he was and the legacy he sought consciously to bequeath. The “Personal Narrative” of c.1740 and *Religious Affections* of 1746 are among the most analysed of all of Edwards’s writings<sup>60</sup> and, probably more than all other works, they exemplify the essential persona of their author once he reached the stage of self-assured public declaration.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 588-93.

<sup>59</sup> In *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (2001), Ian Hunter has a particular approach to the history of philosophy in which he focuses on the “ascetic” or “self-transformative work” that certain philosophies required their adherents to “perform on themselves,” only then “addressing the object of knowledge to which they promise access.” This approach operates principally by treating their different anthropologies and cosmologies, “not in terms of the self they uncovered” or the “cosmos they reveal,” but “in terms of the self they seek to shape for a world they envisage.” Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), x – xi.

<sup>60</sup> Gura points out that the centre of Edwards’s influence as a writer ... is not located in his lengthy theological treatises, which had their greatest currency among other theologians on both sides of the Atlantic. Rather, it was located precisely in works that had their widest circulation in antebellum America ... such as his *Religious Affections* and the *Life of David Brainerd*, as well as the “Conversion of President Edwards” taken from his *Personal Narrative*, and the “Account of Abigail Hutchinson” (excerpted from his *Faithful Narrative*). Philip F. Gura. “Jonathan Edwards in American Literature,” *Early American Literature* 39, no.1 (2004): 158.



(a) *Personal Narrative*

Edwards realized the value of a narrative told in the first person.<sup>61</sup> His “Personal Narrative” probably formed part of a letter addressed to an individual recipient, Aaron Burr, in December 1740.<sup>62</sup> As the earlier letter to Colman and the *Faithful Narrative* had given an account of the Northampton revivals, this letter offers insights into the personal spiritual development of Edwards himself. Thus, while personal in style and subjective in content, it has the polished presentation of a document intended for limited public reception. Again, while ostensibly an epistolary narrative of his personal story, it has many echoes of the theological discourses evident in “The Excellency of Christ.” In fact, the main emphasis of the whole document is the didactic presentation of what Edwards had become convinced were the major doctrines of Christianity, rather than any autobiographical sketch of an individual believer. By uniting his doctrines with some of his spiritual experiences, Edwards believed he was giving his readers what he later attributed to Brainerd, an “opportunity to see a confirmation of the truth, efficacy, and amiableness of the religion taught, in the practice of the same persons who have most clearly and forcibly taught it.”<sup>63</sup>

The structure of the work is quite different from what would normally be expected of a personal narrative. It contains no connected episodic incidents, it is almost devoid of any time or place markers, it has very limited reference to any people or relationships, it has almost no sense of chronological development, and it has no sense of progressive action. What few references there are to such typical narrative elements are not in any way significant for the overall theme of the work. The precise date of a decision of commitment is recorded during his college days and a later year is mentioned in passing, but nothing hangs on these dates. The short reference to the Smith family with whom he lodged in New York is the only personal reference made. A few changes in location are mentioned, but only incidentally. Apart from meditative walks in the fields and an occasional bout of illness, no specific activity is mentioned. Instead, Edwards uses the quasi-narrative format as a platform for the delivery of profound theological reflection. This reflection is only tangentially a record of personal vacillation in the formulation of theological convictions and is more the didactic

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<sup>61</sup> Daniel Shea, “The Art and Instruction of Jonathan Edwards’s *Personal Narrative*,” *Early American Literature* 37, no. 1 (March 1965), 17.

<sup>62</sup> Claghorn, *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Preface to the *Account of Brainerd’s Life* chiefly taken from his own diary and other private writings,” in Norman Pettit, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The Life of David Brainerd*, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 7 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 27-9.

advocacy of a couple of key doctrines.<sup>64</sup> It is in effect a theological treatise dressed loosely in testimonial garb.

The work begins narratively with an account of “remarkable seasons of awakening” experienced by Edwards as a young person, first as a boy in his father’s congregation and later at college.<sup>65</sup> However, that this is to be a theological commentary rather than an autobiographical story is soon clear, as his brief reference to his boyhood delight in abounding in religious duties and conversations is quickly tempered by the warning: “And I am ready to think, many are deceived with such affections, and such a kind of delight, as I then had in religion, and mistake it for grace.”<sup>66</sup> From here on, the whole work is full of such theological observations and admonitions, with a dominant focus on the articulation of the major doctrines of God’s sovereignty and grace and corresponding human frailty.

The major element is the ever-present exaltation of the absolute sovereignty and excellency of God. This dual motif is expressed at the outset, is re-visited constantly and provides the summary doctrinal statement of the whole work. There is no doubt lurking in the theological background the spectre of Arminianism with its emphasis on the dimension of human cooperation in the salvific process. There is also clearly the recalling of notions and language of excellency as used in “The Excellency of Christ.” In every instance of any religious impulse, it is God who is stated as the initiator and total controller. Nowhere does Edwards allow any human idea, affection or circumstance to have a causative force. At college, when he was spiritually low, it was God who was pleased “to seize (him) with a pleurisy; in which he brought (him) nigh to the grave, and shook (him) over the pit of hell.”<sup>67</sup> When he had made seeking his salvation the main business of his life, he notes that he “sought after a miserable manner.”<sup>68</sup> After another extended illness at New Haven, “God was pleased to visit (him) again with the sweet influence of his spirit.”<sup>69</sup> The metaphysical exaltation of God and

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<sup>64</sup> David L. Weddle examines the consistency with which Edwards translated his *martyria* into *kerygma*. “He spoke with an authority grounded in the total correspondence between his sense of personal ‘wholeness’ and the promise of ‘salvation’ he extended to his auditors.”

David L. Weddle, “The Image of the Self in Jonathan Edwards: A Study of Autobiography and Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43, no. 1 (March 1975): 70.

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 790.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 791.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 791.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 791.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 798.

his personal union with him recall “The Excellency of Christ,” with its “sweet conjunction” of paradoxical virtues of majesty and meekness.<sup>70</sup>

While the language of exaltation is similar in many ways to that of “The Excellency of Christ,” there is a distinctive stylistic feature of “Personal Narrative” which reveals Edwards’s different perspective. Here, the tone is not one of any apparent concern with the reader, but rather of an elder statesman recording the important aspects of his personal spirituality, interpreted and commented on from the perspective of mature theological reflection, so that the reader may understand and appropriate the theological significance of it all. Consequently, the various issues of his past are viewed in the light of mature reflection and the interpretation of everything is in terms of his mature doctrine.<sup>71</sup> He recounts his early concept of God’s sovereignty as a “horrible doctrine” that filled him with “terror” with its arbitrary “choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased.”<sup>72</sup> He outlines the stages of development of his attitude in terms of coming to see this sovereignty as just and reasonable, but without recognizing “the extraordinary influence of God’s spirit in it.”<sup>73</sup> Finally, he came to apprehend God’s sovereignty as “a delightful conviction (of) an exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet doctrine.”<sup>74</sup> Throughout, he saw his doctrinal development as coming into a “new sense” of God’s glory. “There came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before ... how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapt up to God in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him.”<sup>75</sup> This narrative is not so much the story of a young man’s journey, but it is a theological interpretation of the process of doctrinal consolidation and conviction. Though only thirty-six years old, Edwards was clearly convicted of the rightness of his doctrine and aware of his duty to ensure others received them as he had experienced them.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 793.

<sup>71</sup> Edwards’s technique through the initial paragraphs of the “Personal Narrative” is to separate the “I” of the narrative from his present self and to characterize the younger “I” as a less reliable judge of spiritual experience than the mature narrator.

Shea, “The Art and Instruction of Jonathan Edwards’s *Personal Narrative*,” 23.

<sup>72</sup> Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” 791-2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 792.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 792.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 792.

<sup>76</sup> By narrative example Edwards will teach “what is false and what is true in religious experience, giving another form to the argument he carried on elsewhere; and he hopes actually to affect his readers by both the content and the presentation of his exemplary experience.”

Shea, “The Art and Instruction of Jonathan Edwards’s *Personal Narrative*,” 19.

The whole tenor of this work is that of one who is convinced that he has the right understanding of God, that he has a cogent clarity of explication of doctrine, and of one who has who has the expectation that readers will receive his doctrine as right. There are no rhetorical questions to challenge the reader, no propositions to explore and justify, and no contentious issues to confront. There is simply a clear and consistent, even repetitive expounding of what he is sure are the pivotal doctrines of the faith: God's absolute sovereignty and excellence and human dependency and insufficiency to achieve anything good or worthy. That doctrinal teaching is his focus is clear in the final pages of the writing, where he leaves the reader with a clear and orderly summary of the essential doctrines of his faith, summarized thus:

The doctrines of God's absolute sovereignty, and free grace, in showing mercy to whom he would show mercy; and man's absolute dependence on the operations of God's Holy Spirit, have very often appeared to me as sweet and glorious doctrines. These doctrines have been much my delight. God's sovereignty has ever appeared to me, as great part of his glory.

I have loved the doctrines of the gospel. The gospel has seemed to me to be the richest treasure; the treasure that I have most desired, and longed that it might dwell richly in me.<sup>77</sup>

This summary statement is followed by a matching summary of the "senses" which, according to Edwards, are necessary for the true Christian, again couched in autobiographical terms but with a clearly didactic generalising intent.

I have sometimes had a sense of the excellent fullness of Christ (who) appeared ineffably excellent, with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception.

I have many times had a sense of the glory of the third person in the Trinity.

I have sometimes had an affecting sense of the excellency of the word of God.<sup>78</sup>

To complete the list of "senses," he adds the corollary of inherent human sinfulness, which has also featured throughout the writing in various expressions of almost Augustinian self-deprecation, even vilification:

I have often since I lived in (Northampton), had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness.... a wickedness that was "perfectly ineffable." Infinite upon infinite. Infinite upon infinite! ... An abyss infinitely deeper than hell.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 799.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 801.

In a final testimonial declaration, he personalised once more the main issue.

I have vastly a greater sense, of my universal, exceeding dependence on God's grace and strength, and mere good pleasure, of late, than I used formerly to have; and have experienced more of an abhorrence of my own righteousness ... yet of late years, I have had a more full and constant sense of the absolute sovereignty of God, and a delight in that sovereignty.<sup>80</sup>

Throughout the "Personal Narrative," Edwards expressed himself as a mature and confident theologian, whose insights were beyond question or negation. The composition is hardly a letter, barely a narrative, and is only superficially personal. The "autobiographical" elements are used constructively and instructively to carry the doctrines, especially the increasingly crystallized doctrine of God's sovereignty and corresponding human dependence. It is written from a perspective of elevated authority, affirmed by personal experience – despite the scarcity of concrete experience involved. While in no way refuting the veracity of the personal spiritual experiences recounted, it can be argued that they are recounted with the principal objective of interpreting them theologically in terms of his grand doctrine. That is, the personalizing of the account can be seen as more a literary technique than a biographical record. Edwards's purpose was effectively to say, "Be imitators of me." This is not a case of a humble individual responding to a request to compile his memoirs; this is a deliberate and mature statement of key doctrine intended to shape the theological mindset of the readership. Edwards was now extremely comfortable in using facets of his personal story as a vehicle of conveying universal doctrinal truth. This was his role and this was how he had now shaped himself.

(b) *Treatise*

In *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), there can be found the most cohesive and extensive expression of the fully developed philosophical and theological persona of Edwards. The book was written as a mature reflection and commentary on the various phenomena of revivalism, recalling previous works and sermons in a compendium of polished argumentation and doctrinal teaching.<sup>81</sup> As John E. Smith put it in his editorial

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 801-2.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 803.

<sup>81</sup> Edwards had treated similar topics in earlier works, including *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737), *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit* (1741), and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742). In *Affections*, this cumulative thinking finds its most refined crystallization.

introduction, Edwards confronted the central question of what criteria may be used to discern genuine from spurious piety. The *Affections*, he says, is “his most acute and detailed treatment of the central task of defining the soul’s relation to God.”<sup>82</sup> It is also the work which demonstrates his ultimate use of literature in the projection of his self-fashioned persona.

Structurally, the *Affections* reveals much of the essential Edwards. The treatise is tightly organized, following the basic Puritan approach to teaching of scripture, doctrine and application. It is clear from the outset what Edwards plans to do. In his Author’s Preface, he immediately propounds the central question: “What is the nature of true religion? and wherein do lie the distinguishing notes of that virtue and holiness, that is acceptable in the sight of God.”<sup>83</sup> His stated aim is “to show the nature and signs of the gracious operations of God’s Spirit, by which they are to be distinguished from all things whatsoever that the minds of men are the subject of, which are not of a saving nature.”<sup>84</sup> What follows is a well organized detailed treatise in three parts, first examining the nature and importance of religious affections, then arguing why false signs of such affections should be rejected, and finally arguing his major case, the identification and expression of genuine spiritual signs of gracious activity in the life of the believer. The approach is consistently propositional, exhaustively detailed and logically presented, working from scriptural selections through doctrinal explication to logical inferences that are irrefutable in terms of the work’s abundant evidence and sustained reasoning.

While such an ordered approach has typified much of Edwards’s prior work, perhaps two things stand out most significantly with regard to the structure of *Affections*. First, through all the complex and detailed strands of argumentation and propositional reasoning, Edwards has managed to weave together the “strands of discovery into a seamless fabric of transcendent experience and God’s excellence.”<sup>85</sup> The consistent focus on God’s excellency and initiatory activity in all genuine religion is the key to understanding Edwards’s mature theology, which he stamps clearly in this treatise. This becomes evident in his identification and analysis of the various false and true signs in Parts II and III. Since both sections list 12 signs, there

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<sup>82</sup> John E. Smith, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Jonathan Edwards Religious Affections*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 1.

<sup>83</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Author’s Preface to *Religious Affections*,” in *Jonathan Edwards Religious Affections*, 84.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>85</sup> Roger Ward, “The Philosophical Structure of Jonathan Edwards’s *Religious Affections*,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 29. no. 4 (Summer 2000): 762.

might be the expectation of a balancing of such signs, in terms of positive and negative expression. However, there is no such counter-balancing of specific behaviours. Rather, the rationale of their selection is the human/divine origin and the old/new nature that distinguish genuine from spurious. The false signs all relate to human concrete dimensions of observable behaviour (bodily effects, much religious talk, religious duties, personal joy and confidence). On the other hand, the signs of true religion are based around the divine origin of the impulses (Signs 1-5), which are naturally followed by the manifestation of the new spiritual nature (Signs 6-10). The final two signs point to the inevitable increase in “spiritual appetite and longing of soul after spiritual attainments” (Sign 11), leading to their “exercise and fruit in Christian practice” (Sign 12).<sup>86</sup> The emphatic assertion of God as origin and object of true religion and the believer’s engagement of God in vitalizing transcendent experience is the major impress of Edwards’s philosophy, expressed in its most comprehensive form in this treatise. This was the message that he was committed to proclaiming.

The second structural element of note is the method of argumentation. Here, it is the authoritative stance of Edwards that dominates. His method of accumulating as much evidence as possible is designed to encompass and to refute in advance any and all possible objections, thus leaving no alternative to his conclusions. In Section I, he starts from a scriptural picture of true religion as a model, proceeds through a sharp defining and distinction of terms such as will, understanding and affections, argues and explains cogently from easily recognizable incidents and examples, and concludes by drawing a number of evidential conclusions: “Having thus considered the evidence of the proposition laid down, I proceed to some inferences.”<sup>87</sup> Similarly, he leads readers through a series of sensible considerations of the evident shortcomings of false expressions in Section II, but without any formal conclusions. His main interest is, of course, in the very long Section III, wherein he earnestly seeks both to inform and to inspire the reader to understand and to participate in the experiential exercise of true religion. In what is often a very technical discourse of nuanced argument, he struggles at times to sustain the tension between detailed analysis and integrated synthesis of holistic religious practice. However, there is a pervasive and consistent note of the omniscient writer, whose word is to be heard and heeded. As had become more common in his later works, he employs scripture very readily as a proof, without fear of putting readers off side. His use of rhetorical questions is also typical of his previous argumentation.

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<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Religious Affections,” in *Jonathan Edwards Religious Affections*, 383.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

But there are some noticeably different developments here. In Section III in particular, he is given more to assertion than to persuasive reasoning. He postulates, but does not provide grounds to justify, a new spiritual sense: “a new inward perception or sensation of their minds, entirely different in its nature and kind, from anything that ever their minds were the subject of before they were sanctified ... a new sense.”<sup>88</sup> Far from his earlier determination to eschew terminology such as “It is clear, it is evident, ’tis exceedingly manifest, ’tis beyond doubt,” he makes such intellectually coercive statements excessively throughout this section.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, this kind of “self-evidential” expression exceeds any attempts at inferential argument. The other noticeable technique adopted in *Affections* is the use of quasi-diatribes, wherein he posits a hypothetical dialogical interjection in order to negate any possible opposing argument, on his own terms. Frequently, he constructs such a dialogue as, “But here, some may be ready to say, what, is there no such thing as .... I answer, there is doubtless such a thing, but ....”<sup>90</sup> This form of controlled virtual debate allows Edwards a means of authoritatively rejecting all possible objections, without really allowing any such objections to have any plausible support.<sup>91</sup> The effect of this is to allow him to express in unequivocal and irrefutable terms the things he wants people to accept. The irrefutability of his views is a significant element of his developed public persona.

Such an assumed personal authority is also evident in the tone of the *Affections*. The language of the treatise suggests a self-confidence in writing that is not deterred by any considerations of possible reader alienation. Instead, there is almost a note of self-indulgence as he luxuriates in the imagistic language that wells up from within his being as he exults in the glory of God, as he deplores the lowliness of humanity yet delights in the newness of life that is the lot of the spiritual Christian. Smith describes the *Affections* as “a work of remarkable literary power,” noting its “meticulous form of expression, a precision in language and ... its

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., *passim*. Numerous examples of such phrases occur throughout this section e.g. at pages 217, 226, 229, 238, 242, 256, 265, and many others.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 224. Numerous other examples occur e.g. at pages 248-249, 324, 330, 350, 361, 378, 413.

<sup>91</sup> In all intellectual disputes Edwards beat down his opponents, demolishing even the slightest contradictions. He had to prove himself right in every detail. Even in his non-combative writings, his arguments were exhaustive. What often appears as repetition was part of a massive effort to block every conceivable loophole. The careful definitions, the close reasoning, the piling up of proofs and illustrations were the natural ways of his thorough and fastidious mind. The truth had to be expressed immaculately and in perfect order, leaving no gaps for error to invade.

Richard L. Bushman, “Jonathan Edwards as a Great Man: Identity, Conversion, and Leadership in the Great Awakening,” in William J. Scheick, ed., *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards*, (Boston, Massachusetts: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980), 45.



exactitude and vividness of language.”<sup>92</sup> Edwards’s use of language combines his earlier delight in imagery with an argumentative precision and ordered logic. The language is simple and stark. On describing the essence of a person’s nature, he writes: “For nature is an abiding thing. A swine that is of a filthy nature may be washed; but the swinish nature remains.”<sup>93</sup> Yet of the regenerated believer, he writes: “’Tis as much the nature of one that is spiritually new born, to thirst after growth in holiness, as ’tis the nature of a newborn babe, to thirst after the mother’s breast; who has the sharpest appetite, when best in health.”<sup>94</sup> The personal delight in the beauty of language is simply demonstrated in this treatise.

At the same time, there is a prevailing tone of authorial superiority towards the reader. The whole treatise is clearly didactic, but delivered from a consciously lofty theological position. One noticeable feature is the frequent overt reference to the lower intellectual ability of the reader – a far cry from the intentional modesty of his earlier writings. Smith has said that Edwards “knew exactly what he wanted to say and he said it in an uncompromising way.”<sup>95</sup> However, “uncompromising” becomes at times “condescending,” especially in the dominant and more heady explanations in Section III. A few examples will illustrate this tendency.

Here, for the sake of the common people, I will explain what is intended by impressions on the imagination, and imaginary ideas.<sup>96</sup>

The common, and less considerate and understanding sort of people, are the more easily led into apprehensions that these things are spiritual things.<sup>97</sup>

Here, for the sake of the more illiterate reader, I will explain what I mean by the moral excellency of divine things.<sup>98</sup>

Unless men may come to a reasonable solid persuasion and conviction of the truth of the gospel ... in the way that has been spoken ... ’tis impossible that those who are illiterate, and unacquainted with history, should have any thorough and effectual conviction of it at all.<sup>99</sup>

Gone now is any mantle of modesty, any strategic down-playing of learning, any concern that blunt language may disaffect the reader. Instead, here is a defining example of an author who has supreme self-confidence in his message and his right to proclaim it. This treatise is not so

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<sup>92</sup> Smith, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Jonathan Edwards Religious Affections*, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Edwards, “Religious Affections,” 341.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>95</sup> Smith, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Jonathan Edwards Religious Affections*, 8.

<sup>96</sup> Edwards, “Religious Affections,” 210.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

much delivered as a scholarly disquisition as it is spoken from the position of lofty oracular authority.

In terms of reception, the authoritative Edwards was clearly determined to lead readers into a new belief, that of a new spiritual sense manifesting itself in a new spiritual person exercising a new spiritual life. In *Affections*, “doctrine and style flow together ... in a fusion of the informative and the evocative functions of language.”<sup>100</sup> In this way, Edwards provides a new paradigm for experiential religion, wherein spiritual conversion reflects God’s absolute sovereignty but also re-defines the associated signs of affection.<sup>101</sup> The reader is exhorted to accept the reality of the divine and the need of a radical transformation of the soul.<sup>102</sup> The reader is told bluntly that “holy affections are not heat without light,” and is urged not to “lightly pass over these things in application to himself.”<sup>103</sup> The new belief that Edwards urges upon the reader, the belief that he expects the reader to accept and implement, is the doctrine of spiritual understanding that “shows a way in which both rationality and direct experience can be preserved within religion.”<sup>104</sup>

In Edwards’s later writings, there is ample evidence to suggest that he had now established clearly his own understanding of his persona and the literary means by which that persona would be exercised. No longer a self-effacing chronicler of religious events, or even an articulate commentator or apologist of local religious happenings, he has now become the self-assured authoritative proclaimer of profound doctrine, designed to shape religious thought and practice both locally and beyond. The message of God’s sovereignty and excellency with its human counterpart of dependency and potential for divine re-creation has come to dominate the man and the man is convicted of his role as proclaimer of that message.

## VI CONCLUSION

Throughout his life, Jonathan Edwards spent a considerable amount of time and energy in fashioning the conduct and character of his person. This study of a representative selection of his private, semi-public and overtly public writings has traced the progressive development of Edwards the writer from his early private notes to his most well-known and popularly analysed *Religious Affections*. In this development, a progressively more intentional self-

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<sup>100</sup> Smith, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Jonathan Edwards Religious Affections*, 9.

<sup>101</sup> Ward, “The Philosophical Structure of Jonathan Edwards’s *Religious Affections*,” 766.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 747.

<sup>103</sup> Edwards, “*Religious Affections*,” 266, 337.

<sup>104</sup> Smith, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Jonathan Edwards Religious Affections*, 47.

fashioning process may be discerned, as he grew in self-confidence and self-understanding as well as in public status. As a result, his literary activity can be seen to have played a significant part in the establishment of his theological and philosophical persona; indeed, in the very shaping of his mature identity.

At the beginning of his literary activity, Edwards displayed all the signs of a careful, organized writer, who constructed a careful blueprint for a successful writing career. His “Cover-Leaf Memoranda” laid out such a blueprint, which he followed carefully, even to some degree in his most private *Diary* entries. This plan involved a careful logical structure, rules of decorum in language and tone, with a studied carefulness in engaging the reader, so as to avoid alienation and to facilitate a smooth, gentle and positive leading into some new dimension of belief. This was the crafted platform which undergirded much of his early writing. However, by the late 1730s, he had travelled further along his own personal journey and was growing in both the assurance of his own doctrine and the esteem of public opinion. By the end of the decade, he was prepared to abandon his rule book and he became far more assertive and argumentative in his writing, with a growing determination to expound serious Christian doctrine rather than to be a mere chronicler of events. Through the 1740s, the fully fledged public persona had been established, as the local commentator had grown into an intentionally crafted shaper of public theology and practice. The main significance of this development was two-fold. First, the growing conviction of the primacy and urgency of the doctrine of God’s sovereignty and excellence came to consume the mind of Edwards. Second, the growing conviction that he had the duty, capacity and right to communicate this message came to control the activity of Edwards. Accordingly, he had changed his shape from that of an observer to that of an oracle. He had taken a firm hold on his message, but now the message was shaping him. The message had effectively become the man.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **TURNING POINTS: THE PERSONA ESTABLISHED**

#### **I INTRODUCTION**

Throughout his ministerial career Jonathan Edwards encountered strong opposition personally, to the degree that he and his message were rejected. At significant turning points his efforts to address the issues he faced involved him in a process of self transformation that he believed would empower him to resolve the conflicts. However, in developing an intentional persona, Edwards at times adopted some of the elements of the public persona of those who were instrumental in causing the problems. To some degree this overshadowed what was innate in his own nature, with the resultant tensions leading to a number of significant crises in his development.

The previous chapters have analysed the various forces which progressively impinged on Edwards's development. Throughout his public career, there were certain critical moments which can be identified as crucial turning points in the shaping of his persona. This chapter presents a review of those critical moments in his career and in so doing connects the various formative stages in his life that led ultimately to the established and mature persona of Edwards the ecclesiastical leader.

Edwards's ministerial vocation can be reviewed in several stages which demonstrate the formation and consolidation of his public persona. In his early career he functioned under the watchful eye of family and friends. The major formative period of his persona was spent in pastoral office at Northampton, where significant individual development occurred during the ups and downs of pastoral ministry. By the end of his Northampton tenure, he had come to a realization of just how his influence could be best expressed. Finally, deposed from office at Northampton, he found the freedom to exercise that mature expression at Stockbridge.

#### **II EARLY PERIOD (1722-1729)**

The early stage of Edwards's vocation was a period in which he was essentially a protégé in a protected environment. Following his undergraduate study at Yale in his teens, Edwards took on a brief pastorate in New York (August 1722 - April 1723), after which he returned home for summer to East Windsor to complete his postgraduate study. His father Timothy arranged for him to pastor a nearby church in Bolton for several months (November 1723 - May 1724).

It was in 1724 that the twenty-one year old scholar Edwards was appointed to a tutorship at Yale, a position he held until 1726 despite a serious prolonged illness in 1725. He was then invited to assist Grandfather Solomon Stoddard in the ministry at Northampton in 1726, which he did until Stoddard's death in 1729. It was in this period of entry into ministry that Edwards found a ready-made and very protective environment in which to plant the seeds of his own public persona. In particular, this was a formative time in which he had the privilege of a number of strong exemplars who were to exert a strong influence on the novice minister. They effectively provided Edwards with the context in which he was to begin to shape his own professional and public identity.

When Jonathan Edwards set out on his clerical career, both the ecclesiastical context and the path he should take had already been mapped by his Puritan forebears, his grandfather Solomon Stoddard and his father Timothy Edwards. It is true that New England ministers were constantly at loggerheads with the civil rulers, who rarely did what the ministers wanted. However, the well established ecclesiastical context (if not the civic context) of New England was that of a Puritan theocracy, with its institutional forms governing not only personal beliefs and morality but also the understanding of nature, history, all human activities and institutions such as government, economics, art, literature, education, or the family.<sup>1</sup> The totality of community life was thus made conformable to God's will.<sup>2</sup> Deference to institutional hierarchy was apparent in all areas of life, including family, church and society. Clergymen in New England wielded more authority and could expect more deference to their opinions than in most other parts of the British World. This was the context in which Edwards was to commence his ministerial career. From his forebears, Edwards inherited this socio-ecclesiastical institutionalism which was part of the cost of developing his own position as a member of the dominant colonial aristocracy. His early advancement depended on family connections and his pastoral career unfolded in the context of the Stoddard-Williams clan that he was born into.<sup>3</sup> Edwards belonged to an elite extended family that was part of the ruling class of clergy, magistrates, judges, military leaders, village squires and merchants. The Stoddard-Williams clan, along with a few other families with whom they intermarried, ruled

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<sup>1</sup> Jerald C. Brauer, "The Rule of the Saints in American Politics," *Church History* 27, no. 3 (September 1958): 242.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-3.

<sup>3</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 376.

the Connecticut River Valley, or western Massachusetts (Hampshire County) and parts of Connecticut.<sup>4</sup>

In 1722, approximately a year and a half after his self-designated conversion, Edwards went to preach to a small Presbyterian congregation in New York under the watchful eye of the Smiths. This was the first stage of his pastoral development. The Smiths provided an example of godly piety in ministry, which was to have a profound effect on the impressionable Jonathan and leave him with a yearning for more. He warmly recalled the relationship:

I had then abundance of sweet religious conversation in the family where I lived, with Mr John Smith, and his pious mother. My heart was knit in affection to those, in whom were appearances of true piety; and I could bear the thoughts of no other companions, but such as were holy, and the disciples of the blessed Jesus.

I very frequently used to retire into a solitary place on the banks of the Hudson's River, at some distance from the city, for contemplation on divine things, and secret converse with God, and had many sweet hours there. Sometimes Mr. Smith and I walked there together, to converse on the things of God. ... I came away from New York in the month of April 1723, and had a most bitter parting with Madam Smith and her son. My heart seemed to sink within me, at leaving the family and city, where I had enjoyed so many sweet and pleasant days.<sup>5</sup>

While this pastoral placement lasted just nine months, the Smith exemplar planted a significant seed in the developing Edwards, a seed which would grow into conflict with other contrary examples he would soon encounter.

In April 1723, Jonathan Edwards's New York pastorate ended and he returned to his parents' home at East Windsor to prepare his Master's *Quaestio* entitled *A sinner is not justified in the Sight of God Except Through the Righteousness of Christ Obtained by Faith*, which he delivered in September to receive his Master of Arts.<sup>6</sup> Later that same year he reluctantly accepted a position at a small church at Bolton, Connecticut, close to his parents, until his election to a tutorship at Yale in May of 1724. Timothy Edwards had grave concerns about

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in George S. Claghorn, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 16 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 797.

<sup>6</sup> See Kenneth P. Minkema, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1723-1729*, Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 14 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997), 47-66.

his son's stay in New York and was instrumental in securing Jonathan this position at Bolton. Jonathan's response to the enquiry from Bolton had been less than enthusiastic. In a "cover note" to the Bolton congregation, Timothy Edwards said that he could "find Nothing" in his son's letter that is "Discouraging as to ye Motion you have made to him."<sup>7</sup> While little is known of Edwards's brief sojourn at Bolton, it was clear that his appointment had been arranged by his ever anxious father, who was eager to keep his son close to home and under his watchful eye.

In the spring of 1724, Edwards was elected as a tutor to Yale, a post he would hold for two years. Tutoring at Yale was his first work experience without the support of friends and family. Faced by the pressures of everyday life, he exhibited a degree of frustration and exasperation over practical affairs that distracted him from God. Soon after he became a tutor he lamented:

This week has been a very remarkable week with me, with respect to despondencies, fears, perplexities, multitudes of cares, and distraction of mind; it being the week I came hither to New Haven, in order to entrance upon the office of Tutor of the College. I have now abundant reason to be convinced of the troublesomeness and vexation of the world, and that it will never be another kind of world.<sup>8</sup>

While these early signs of discomfort with the system were emerging, Edwards submitted to the system as it was a necessary requisite for his career path. Still, it is noteworthy that here is an early signal of that inner conflict that would emerge more significantly as he matured: the tension between the desire to withdraw into his own world and the need to submit to the vexations of the social world.

Yale College was struggling and had lacked real leadership since the defection of the then rector, Timothy Cutler, to the Arminian cause. The board designed a stopgap system of having local ministers serve as acting rectors on a monthly rotating basis. That left the school's forty to fifty mostly teenage boys in the hands of two tutors who were only a few years older. The College was particularly out of hand during Jonathan's years.<sup>9</sup> Fifteen years later in his "Personal Narrative," he recorded that, after he went to New Haven, he "sunk in religion; my mind being diverted from my eager pursuits after holiness by some affairs that

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<sup>7</sup> MS71914 Connecticut Historical Society Hartford, Connecticut, in *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1723-1729*, 5 n7.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Diary," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 786.

<sup>9</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 101.

greatly perplexed and distracted my mind.”<sup>10</sup> The distractions of college teaching brought on a spiritual decline. While accepting the Yale tutorship as a necessary part of his career, nonetheless it was a period of significant loss for Edwards. He seems to have lost the ability to become “swallowed up” in the direct experience of the divine. Edwards found all manner of “change or alteration” to be spiritually detrimental – “journeys, change of place, change of business, change of studies, and change of other circumstances.” He desired stability, so as to engage in his spiritual quest without hindrance.<sup>11</sup> The conflict between his somewhat naive desire for personal holiness and the intrusive pragmatic demands of fitting the institutional mould was to become a constant tension within the development of his persona.

It was no doubt with a sense of being rescued from this unhappy stint at Yale that Edwards accepted Northampton’s invitation to assist his grandfather. His support structures were restored; he was to live with his grandparents; he would be further absorbed into the Stoddard-Williams establishment. Northampton was Edwards’s reward for his youthful achievements and illustrious ancestry. Chosen colleague and then successor to the renowned Stoddard, Edwards had every reason to be pleased with his good fortune.<sup>12</sup> In the words of his early biographer, Sereno Dwight, Edwards “had passed through the successive periods of childhood, youth, and early manhood, not only without reproach, but in such a manner, as to secure the high esteem of all who knew him.” He was “a young man of uncommon promise.”<sup>13</sup> Edwards’s move to Northampton in 1726 was a move into the seat of family power. Solomon Stoddard, like a feudal baron whose power depended on personal allegiances, had used kinship ties to connect with other powerful clergy, merchants and magistrates – with the other “river gods” as they sometimes were collectively known.<sup>14</sup> The people of Northampton, according to Edwards, regarded Grandfather Stoddard “almost as a sort of deity.”<sup>15</sup> Edwards also held his grandfather in the highest regard.<sup>16</sup> He was now in a

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<sup>10</sup> Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” 798.

<sup>11</sup> Michael J. McClymond, *Encounters With God, An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 44.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers from Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985), 23.

<sup>13</sup> Sereno E. Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards* (New York, 1829), 107, 109, in Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1979), 51.

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Michael Sweeney, “River Gods and Related Minor Deities: The Williams Family and the Connecticut River Valley, 1637-1790,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1986), 2. Pro Quest Dissertations and Theses (accessed April 20, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Thomas Gillespie, July 1, 1751,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 385.



position where he would cultivate a public persona as a means of exerting communal influence. The exemplary influence of Stoddard, in both content and style, was to play an important role in the early shaping of Edwards's persona.

In Northampton, Edwards was surrounded by the Stoddard-Williams clan.<sup>17</sup> The formative influence on the young man was immediate and profound. The first year Edwards lived in Northampton, he met his Uncle John Stoddard, a Harvard graduate of some learning and a man of piety, who took his young nephew under his wing and remained his most important ally and patron.<sup>18</sup> His marriage to Sarah Pierpont in July 1727 was a step signalling his transition to adult and authoritative status. Under the leadership of Squire John Stoddard, the town saw that the young couple were well settled as befitted their status. Edwards was granted ten acres of land for pasture and another forty acres farther from town that could be used for income. The Northampton town meeting specifically agreed that "he should have an honourable and suitable maintenance according to the dignity of his office" and sufficient funds to acquire a "Mansion house, barn and home lot of three acres, on King street near the church."<sup>19</sup> This ample provision of needs was a clear statement of the respect due to the office of minister, a respect assumed by Edwards as he embarked on his ministerial vocation. The Stoddard family was an indispensable component of life in the Northampton community.<sup>20</sup> It was natural that Jonathan would imbibe the same understanding of himself as he set about establishing that role more definitively.

The other pivotal link in the chain of family relationships was Solomon Stoddard's son-in-law William Williams, pastor of the neighbouring town of Hatfield. William Williams was regarded as the most talented clerical figure in the most prominent clan among the

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<sup>16</sup> In a *Miscellanies* entry from 1727 he wrote, "The best philosophy that I have ever met with, of original sin and all sinful inclinations, habits and principles, is undoubtedly that of Mr Stoddard's of this town of Northampton."

Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies 301," in Thomas A. Shafer, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500)*, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 13 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 387.

<sup>17</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>19</sup> James R. Trumbull, *History of Northampton, Massachusetts, from Its Settlement in 1654*, 2 vols. (Northampton, Massachusetts: 1898, 1902), 2: 45, 47-48, in Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 124.

<sup>20</sup> There were very few persons in Northampton who had been born before he became the pastor of the only church in that Puritan village. For sixty years, every aspect of daily life had been the subject of his watchful care and his thundering Sabbath sermons. He had been their intellectual and moral leader, their Patriarch in the Old Testament style he deliberately adopted as a model of church polity and community ethics. Stoddard's stature transcended even the leadership of a small town on the frontier a hundred miles from Boston, for he had in fact been for many decades one of the most influential clergymen in all of New England.

Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 14.

Connecticut Valley gentry. The Williams family too had intermarried with just about every leading family in the area and hence were connected with all the leading merchants and political leaders as well as many of the clergy. Though William Williams and Solomon Stoddard did not agree on everything, the two leaders stood firmly together on important issues. On February 11, 1729, when Solomon Stoddard died, William Williams, the ecclesiastical heir apparent, preached the principal funeral sermon.<sup>21</sup> No doubt, the young heir to the Northampton pulpit took notice of all that was said about his recently departed grandfather. Here again was reinforced Edwards's understanding of Stoddard's influence in both religious and civic spheres, an influence understood as emanating from his ministerial position.

Jonathan Edwards's job description rang out in Stoddard's eulogy, delivered by one of Boston's most influential divines, the Reverend Doctor Benjamin Colman of the Brattle Street church. Colman used the occasion to lament the loss of a beloved colleague from the west who was "a Prophet and a Father not only to the neighbouring churches of his own county, but also to those of the whole land." He was regarded as "a Peter here among the Disciples ... very much our Primate ... among the first for light and integrity, for knowledge and great judgment, for faith and love which is in Christ Jesus, and for zeal and boldness in the cause of Truth and Holiness."<sup>22</sup> Appended to the published version of Colman's sermon was a copy of the obituary which had appeared in Boston's *Weekly Newsletter* on February 20: "Too eminent a person to be suffered to slip into the grave in silence." He was the very model of a puritan patriarch. "His natural powers were quick and strong, and by the blessing of God on his studies, he was furnished with that learning which was requisited to make a divine of the first rank." Scholarship alone was not his glory, for he had won many converts to true piety. "He was favoured with a more than ordinary presence of God in his work, and many seals on his ministry, in the course of which there were three remarkable seasons, in which the Spirit of God so moved upon the hearts of his people, that it became almost a general cry of the place, 'What must I do to be saved?'" The obituary writer (from Northampton but otherwise unidentified) conveyed his sense of the transition in the pulpit by wishing for young Mr Edwards "that the mantle of Elijah may rest upon Elisha."<sup>23</sup> It was largely in this phrase that Edwards would see himself as the natural heir to the quasi-apostolic office and status that he – and many others – had attributed to Stoddard. The inherited

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<sup>21</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 116.

<sup>22</sup> Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton*, 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

positional status thus assumed was an integral part of the developing persona of the new minister, though it stood at odds with much of the holiness-seeking pietist that was innate in the young Jonathan Edwards. When Edwards mounted the steps of the Northampton meeting house on February 16, 1729, aged just twenty-five, he was not unprepared for this responsibility. He had received an excellent academic training and had prior preaching experience. But, in all previous engagements he had been temporary, provisional, or subordinate. Now he was the man.

Jonathan Edwards had committed himself to a situation in which anything less than astounding success would look like comparative failure. He was stepping into the shoes of the man who had been called the “Congregational Pope” of the Connecticut Valley. Yet while the mantle of Elijah (Stoddard) was bestowed on Elisha (Edwards), there was another exemplar for the new man, perhaps an even more formative link in the family dynasty, namely, Timothy Edwards, his father and pastor of the East Windsor congregation. In many religious families, the first son was pushed towards the ministry. With such a family heritage there could have been no doubt that the only son of Timothy and Esther Stoddard Edwards was destined to be a clergyman.<sup>24</sup> The particular lesson that Edwards learned in the East Windsor parsonage was, in fact, that although the ministry was the most honourable of professions, it could easily be a martyr’s vocation. From his father’s career, Edwards may have taken the lesson that a minister must wage constant warfare with his congregation for even the minimum respect and authority that God had intended him to have.<sup>25</sup> This inherited notion of a minister as a martyr in conflict was to become another pronounced element in Edwards’s clerical make-up.

Timothy Edwards was obsessed with pastoral authority – or rather, his lack of it. There was frequent open conflict over his salary – a matter of practical importance and a symbol of respect that bedevilled many clergymen – and over the pastor’s right to absolute control within the church. Timothy Edwards was especially sensitive about the morality and discipline of young people and demanded an absolute veto on admission and discipline and even complete control of the choice of issues to be discussed by the church at their meetings.<sup>26</sup> Echoes of his father’s concerns with salary and its symbolism, wayward young people, and ministerial control of church admission and discipline provide evidence of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 54-6.

Edwards's immersion in his inherited traditions. Ultimately, the innate attributes of Edwards's disposition, his conjoint quest for holiness and the fruits of that quest (his prolific writings) would reign supreme, but in the early formative stage, the pre-occupation with the nature and exercise of ministerial authority as sought by Timothy and demonstrated by Stoddard were strong determinants of his developing persona. His natural desire to quest after holiness through self-indulgent introspective meditation was overshadowed by the demands of the public apostolic function that he saw as the requisite of his office.

Thus, this first stage of Edwards's career was marked by the dominant formative influence of a number of powerful exemplars within the received context of the Puritan/Calvinist tradition; by Edwards's conscious and conscientious adoption of such strong role models; and by his willing submission to the inherited traditions, despite an inner tension between his private quest for holiness and the perceived demands of the public system in which he was becoming progressively more immersed. The Puritan system of church and society was the backdrop of his development, the seedbed in which the seeds of his persona were planted. His Yale experience was admittedly unpleasant to him, but he submitted to its requirements as necessary. His very strong family inheritance of social connections, civic prominence and ministerial power laid the basis of his understanding of the office of the minister. Yet in all this were the echo of the godly Smiths and the pervasive reality of his own conversion experiences, which were to provide a distinctive shape to his emerging theology and practice of that office. The inherited mantle of Elijah was to be accepted, and entailed the necessary subjugation of personal preferences in the execution of that role. Edwards would need to imbue the role with his own distinctive quality, which he would progressively do over the next twenty years.

### **III VOCATIONAL LIFE: NORTHAMPTON (1729-1750)**

The majority of Edwards's ministerial career was spent as the sole minister at Northampton Church as successor to Stoddard. If his first stage could be typified as that of a protégé under protective patronage, the pastorate at Northampton can be seen as a case of going it alone. The overall term of his appointment can be divided into two sections which demonstrate a turnaround in his self-fashioning. At first, in the period to 1743, Edwards's star was on the rise as sole pastor of the prestigious Northampton congregation that experienced Awakenings in 1734-1735 and 1740-1742. However, in the period 1744-1750, he became embroiled in

numerous controversies and conflicts in which his downward spiral in the eyes of the town and church led to his dismissal in 1750. The waxing and waning of this period saw first a consolidation of his inherited office and status, his individual refinement of that office and his persona, and finally a severe loss of much of the inherited influence which necessitated a re-evaluation of his role and personal exercise of influence.

As Edwards assumed the “mantle of Elijah and Elisha” at the age of twenty-nine, he already had the making of a man of authority. He was much aware of the authority of his office and the deference it should command. He was God’s spokesman in Northampton. He was, in one of his favourite metaphors, “the trumpet of God.”<sup>27</sup> Now out of the shadow of the patriarchal Stoddard, he needed to establish his own authority. Edwards’s suddenly increased responsibilities revealed his Achilles heel, a condition that was to accompany him for the whole of his life and cause him much anguish.<sup>28</sup> He had a less than robust physical constitution not well suited to the ambitious over-reaching which came to typify his work. He was now responsible for the oversight and welfare of perhaps 1300 people.<sup>29</sup> In the spring shortly after Stoddard’s death in 1729, his health collapsed. In later April and early May, he and his two Sarahs (his wife and first daughter) took a trip to New Haven and East Windsor, perhaps for a needed rest or reassurance. After a few weeks back in the pulpit, he was struck down more severely and could not preach for about a month in the early summer. One of Sarah’s brothers, Benjamin Pierpont, supplied the pulpit.<sup>30</sup> This propensity to succumb to periodic illness plagued him constantly and remained an almost continuous backdrop and hindrance to all his ministerial endeavours.

Despite his poor physical state, the early years were propitious for Edwards as he set about establishing his ministerial authority. His strategy involved three basic elements, namely, the continued patronage of influential people in Northampton society, the cultivation of an advantageous network of influential people beyond Northampton, and the growing self-confidence in the rightness of his personal beliefs as foundational to true religion. These are

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<sup>27</sup> Helen Westra, *The Minister’s Task and Calling in the Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 7.

<sup>28</sup> The story of Jonathan Edwards’s physical debility, of a lifelong tendency to physical collapse, probably the result of his ascetic regimen aggravated by nervous tensions and his strenuous work schedules, is well documented.

Wilson H. Kinnach, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1743-1758*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 22 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 42.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards indicated that there were about 200 families in Northampton in the 1730s.

Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 89.

<sup>30</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 127.

the elements which shaped his ministerial persona in the period 1729-1743 and enabled him to exercise considerable influence. However, they also left him vulnerable to significant loss of influence in due course.

By the end of 1729, Edwards was winning the approval of his Northampton parishioners. Timothy Edwards proudly reported to his daughter Anne that Benjamin Pierpont had told him “that the people of Northampton seem to have a great love and respect for him, and that they take great content in his ministry. They continue their usual kindness to him, and have built him a good large barn and almost finished it, since he hath been laid aside by his weakness from his work.”<sup>31</sup> For Edwards, the magistrate-patron now of crucial importance was his uncle, Colonel John Stoddard. Second son of Solomon Stoddard, Colonel Stoddard was a man of affairs, a military commander, political leader and wealthy real estate merchant. After his father’s death in 1729, John Stoddard married in 1731 and continued to live in the family home, which signalled his inheritance and his baronial authority as the richest man in the town and its most influential magistrate.<sup>32</sup> Through his close relationship with his Uncle John Stoddard, Edwards had firm connections with Massachusetts’ political leaders, including Governor Belcher. John Stoddard was a pillar of the church and he frequently presided over town meetings, as he had over the one that called his nephew Jonathan to assist his father Solomon Stoddard.<sup>33</sup>

Elsewhere, Edwards was connected not only to Yale and the Connecticut elite, but also to Benjamin Colman and the circle of Boston’s most influential leaders. Building connections with internationally connected clergy, including Benjamin Colman and Thomas Prince, Sr. of New England; James Robe, William McCulloch, John McLaurin, and John Erskine of Scotland; and English ministers Watts, Guyse and Doddridge, suited his ambitions to proclaim his gospel truth to the whole world.<sup>34</sup> Edwards was emerging as a significant figure in the New England ecclesiastical establishment. In that process he was involved in a number

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<sup>31</sup> Timothy Edwards, “Letter to Anne Edwards, September 12, 1729,” quoted in *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1723-1729*, 13-14.

<sup>32</sup> John Stoddard was, in effect, the village Squire and was sometimes referred to as such. He was Northampton’s most frequently elected representative to the Massachusetts General Court, although he was at the centre of the town’s political contentions. He sometimes served as a member of the Governor’s Council. His loyalty to the royal governors was rewarded with various local judicial posts and control of the patronage in Hampshire County. Everyone – country resident and provincial governors alike – knew that whatever was distributed in Hampshire county came along with the approval of Colonel Stoddard.

George H. Nobles, *Divisions Throughout the Whole Politics and Society in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1740-1775* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 30.

<sup>33</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 115.

<sup>34</sup> Susan O’Brien, “A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (October 1986): 819.

of campaigns and controversies, each of which helped shape patterns of alliances and commitments that would define much of his career.<sup>35</sup> His growing prominence as a member of a broadening social and cultural elite served him well in the shaping of his persona as a prophetic voice of an increasingly wide community.

Even more important to Edwards than all these social and cultural associations, however, was the burgeoning sense of the authority of his own personal piety and special insight into God's presence and activity in the world. He found assisting his grandfather in the pastorate much more conducive to his quest for holiness than tutoring at Yale. Looking back in 1740, Edwards noted that, from his arrival in 1726 in Northampton, he found that he had possessed an inward sweetness,

that used, as it were, to carry me away in my contemplations; in what I know not how to express otherwise, than by a calm, sweet abstraction of soul from all the concerns o[f] this world; and a kind of vision, or fixed ideas and imaginations, of being alone in the mountains, or some solitary wilderness, far from all mankind, sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapt and swallowed up in God. The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden as it were, kindle up a sweet burning in my heart; an ardour of my soul that I know not how to express.<sup>36</sup>

Edwards's *Personal Narrative* is filled with such quasi-epiphanic experiences that came to define him and formed the foundation of his philosophical-theological writings.<sup>37</sup> Edwards became so confident of the experiential reality and the analytical precision of his interpretation of his faith based on these experiences that his definition of conversion gradually became, in his own mind, the norm by which he could measure the faith of others.

These defining experiences also challenged and undermined his grandfather's conversionist theology, specifically in relation to the steps to conversion (see chapter 1), and church membership (see chapter 4). Thus it was that the power of his personal experiential piety came into conflict with his received Stoddardean belief system and his observed community praxis. In a way, he was coming to abandon one pillar of his authority – the once irreproachable doctrine of Stoddard – but without forgoing the other pillar – the inherited autocratic style of Stoddard. He sought to exploit the notion of the power of position in order to establish what he considered the more legitimate authority of experiential piety. This

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<sup>35</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 170.

<sup>36</sup> Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 793.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 790-804.

ambivalence generated substantial conflict which would become a significant problem for him in the following decade. William Williams's death on August 31, 1741 marked another turning point in Edwards's life.<sup>38</sup> Most immediately, the loss of Williams threatened the tenuous relationship with his powerful Williams cousins, led by William's magistrate son Israel. The erosion of the power of position occasioned by William's death was a further factor in ushering in the controversial decade which followed, when Edwards was forced into a radical re-evaluation of his power and authority and ultimately to re-define his personal identity as a prophetic voice.

The climate of religious fervour – even euphoria – born of the revivals presented Edwards with the opportunity to communicate to his congregation something of the passion of his own quasi-epiphanic experiences. However, in what was perhaps the most significant of his ministerial leadership failings, he lacked either the acumen or the ability to seize such a propitious moment. Instead, Edwards directed his attention to the old and in many ways inherited challenges of church discipline and ministerial authority. The specific issues that precipitated the ultimate confrontation between Edwards and his congregation were the perennial concerns – discipline of young people and piety in the church.<sup>39</sup> By 1744, Edwards's mantle was beginning to fade. To this time, his star had been steadily on the rise. He had gained an international reputation as a preacher of awakenings via his writings and he was a bright junior member of the Stoddard-Williams clan who was gradually taking his place in the galaxy of New England's establishment. However, over the next seven years, he found himself confronted by serious challenges to the positional power of the minister, which led to a loss of his inherited confidence and an altered self-perception.

#### **IV CHURCH CONTROVERSIES**

Early in 1744, a group of Northampton's adolescent boys secretly circulated among themselves a number of popular medical texts containing detailed descriptions of the structure and function of women's reproductive anatomy. They then used their newly acquired knowledge to taunt and ridicule adolescent girls. The majority of the boys implicated in the scandal were members of Northampton's elite, all but one of the young men

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<sup>38</sup> That Edwards was chosen to preach his funeral sermon likely reflected the express wishes of the uncle and signalled his choice for leadership. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 230.

<sup>39</sup> Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton*, 160.



being church members and most having joined during the 1734-1735 Awakening.<sup>40</sup> Several of the girls testified that the young men had been reading “a book that they called the Bible in a laughing way.” Timothy Root in particular called it “the young folk’s Bible.”<sup>41</sup> In a Puritan/Calvinist community, where there were few sacred objects and where the Bible was the highest authority, this was serious sacrilege.<sup>42</sup> When Edwards became aware of the boys’ conduct, he asked the brethren of the church to initiate an investigation, and they complied. The brethren “chose a Number of Men, to assist their Pastor in examining into the Affair. Upon which Mr Edwards appointed the time for their meeting at his House and then read a Catalogue of the Names of young Persons, whom he desired to come to his House at the same time. Some were accused, and some Witnesses; but it was not then declared of which Number any particular Person was.”<sup>43</sup> Edwards’s approach to solving this issue was the standard that he had adopted from his precedent exemplars, namely, the imposition of ministerial discipline on the boys.

The case entered a second phase when a number of the brethren who had initially supported the action, some of whom were evidently parents of the accused boys, “altered their minds ... and declared, they did not think it proper to proceed as they had done.” Before the committee even met, “the town was suddenly all on a Blaze.”<sup>44</sup> Although the church brethren “with one consent, and much Zeal, manifested it to be their Opinion, that it ought to be enquired into,” when the matter was brought into family and community circles, that consensus rapidly broke down. Samuel Hopkins may not have exaggerated when he quipped that many of the brethren “condemned what they had done, before they got home to their own Houses.” Prior to the first meeting of the investigating committee, “a great Number of Heads of Families altered their minds” and decided “that their Children should not be called to an Account in such a way for such things.”<sup>45</sup> When the Committee finally met, some of the accused “refused to appear” and “others that did appear behaved unmannerly, and with great Degree of Insolence,

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<sup>40</sup> Ava Chamberlain, “Bad Books and Bad Boys, The Transformation of Gender in Eighteenth Century Northampton, Massachusetts,” in David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 65.

<sup>41</sup> “Confession of Timothy and Simeon Root, owned June 1744.” (Works of Edwards transcription, ANTS manuscript). Edwards, who wrote out the confession, noted that the following portion in brackets was included for Timothy, a church member, but not for Simeon: “[and violated the obligations I am under as a member of this church, engaged by solemn covenant to be subject to the authority of the church.]” Cited in Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 563 n25.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1765), 54.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>45</sup> Chamberlain, “Bad Books and Bad Boys, The Transformation of Gender in Eighteenth Century Northampton, Massachusetts,” 69-70.

and contempt of the Authority of the Church.”<sup>46</sup> It was patently clear that Edwards’s assumed ministerial authority was no match for status-conscious established family loyalty, a pattern that was to recur often. The old Stoddard had been able to exercise such power; the younger Edwards was not. Such explicit non-submission to his authority caused Edwards to re-assess his influence in the loss of public support that was now welling up against him.

Much of what Edwards had built up came crashing down in this small-town squabble. Edwards was attributing momentous importance to behaviour that looked trivial, even if childish and distasteful, to many other inhabitants of the town. The more he made of it, the more he lost support. Edwards himself later referred to it as that “which gave so great offense, and by which I became so obnoxious.”<sup>47</sup> In Hopkins’s opinion, the so-called Bad-Book affair “seemed in a great Measure to put an end to Mr Edwards’s Usefulness at Northampton, and doubtless laid a Foundation” for the congregation’s 1750 vote to dismiss him.<sup>48</sup> Beneath Edwards’s rather clumsy efforts to correct the situation may lie his conviction that awakenings generally started with the youth of the community. Prior to the 1734-1735 Awakening, the young people “had been reforming more and more; they by degrees left off their frolicking, and have been observably more decent in their attendance at public worship, etc.”<sup>49</sup> Edwards was immersed in a Puritan religious culture that accorded high prominence to revivals and awakenings as a manifestation of God’s saving grace. He appears convinced that piety, both his and the congregation’s, was a prerequisite for God’s presence and activity in any revivals in the town of Northampton. Thus this rebellious spirit was not simply a challenge to the traditional power of the minister, it was also a challenge to Edwards’s self-perception as a prophet of revival.

The second serious challenge was another old issue, that of the pastor’s salary. Tensions had been building on this issue when the “young folk’s Bible” scandal erupted. Edwards’s salary was relatively generous. Since money was scarce, payments were often slow. In March 1744, Sarah, who managed the family finances, asked the town for past-due salary, stating that “Mr

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<sup>46</sup> Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Farewell Sermon Preached at the First Precinct in Northampton, After the People’s Public Rejection of Their Minister ... on June 22, 1750,” in Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, eds. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999), 234.

<sup>48</sup> Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards*, 55.

<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend Benjamin Colman,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 48-58.

Edwards is under such obligations that he can't possibly do without it.”<sup>50</sup> Edwards's relationship with the town had reached a state of mutual resentment. In a letter he wrote in November 1744 requesting a fixed salary, he indicated that their inquiries into his family budget were impertinent. “It can be expected in so large a society as this is, but that, under these circumstances, there will be some that will be unsuitably meddling with a minister's affairs; and it may be a temptation even to rational, good sort of men, to look into a minister's affairs, and his way of spending his money than is convenient.”<sup>51</sup> Edwards was willing to settle for a fixed wage which might not be adjusted to keep up with inflation, in return for an end to the embarrassing inquiries into his spending – a method of harassment which did not deceive him.<sup>52</sup> In December 1746, he again pressed for a fixed salary. After considerable debate, the precinct voted not to give in even if they were able to find a way to correct any fixed amount for inflation: a further expression of non-submission to pastoral authority. A year later Edwards again petitioned for “the reasonableness and expediency of fixing his salary,” but not until March of 1748, after many more long and bitter debates, did a majority of the taxpayers agree to settle “seven hundred pounds Old Tenor per year” on their pastor, the sum to rise and fall proportionally to the value of certain staples. Edwards would still have to negotiate those values annually, but he had won in principle.<sup>53</sup> Though a victory of sorts for Edwards, the protracted struggle was another indicator that he would need more than position to exert influence. This was the first and clearest manifestation of the Northampton congregation's unwillingness to give its pastor what he regarded as proper homage to his office.<sup>54</sup>

The third challenge and major turning point for Edwards came soon after, on June 19, 1748, with the unexpected death of Colonel John Stoddard in Boston. As noted in chapter 4, John Stoddard had been the head of the committee that had endorsed Edwards's salary and together, the two men were influential in promoting the nexus of an ordered society and true religion. In Northampton, John Stoddard had been his perennial benefactor.<sup>55</sup> Edwards's

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<sup>50</sup> Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton*, 155-156.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the First Precinct, Northampton,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 149-51.

<sup>52</sup> Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton*, 158-9.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-9.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>55</sup> During the controversies over the Great Awakening of 1741-42, Stoddard had written a treatise (now lost) defending much the same view as his nephew's. Jonathan found him “no inconsiderable divine,” as able as the best divines he knew to give advice in cases of conscience, and able to “discourse of experimental religion” as one “intimately and feelingly acquainted with these things.” Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 343-5.

fulsome eulogy for Stoddard focused on extolling his exemplary virtues. Stoddard was among the very wisest of politicians; the best judges of people and circumstances; the shrewdest and most foresighted of counsellors; the most reliable of friends; the most honest, the most public-spirited, and the most knowledgeable of the affairs of New England, Canada, and of all the Indian nations. He had truly cared for his people like a father for his children. “Perhaps never was there a man that appeared in New England,” Edwards declared, “to whom the denomination *great man* did more properly belong.”<sup>56</sup> Hampshire County’s leaders, including some of his Williams cousins, might swell with pride as Edwards lauded the fallen patriarch.<sup>57</sup> Yet the eulogy also included an unveiled and politically insensitive challenge by Edwards for many who came to mourn his loss, whom he believed did not measure up to his uncle’s standards.

The death of Colonel John Stoddard proved pivotal in Edwards’s fall from power. Now deprived of the last of his patrons, he was obliged to stand alone in the face of growing hostility. Drawing on his burgeoning sense of the authority of his own personal piety, Edwards adopted the inherited autocratic style of Solomon Stoddard in order to establish what he regarded as his more legitimate authority of experiential piety. He sought to exploit the notion of the power of position and his battle for ministerial authority began in earnest with the Northampton congregation and town. No longer was this the moralist preacher seeking to rebuke some wayward adolescents; rather, this was the apostolic autocrat seeking to establish his authority over the congregation *in toto*.

Edwards’s first move was to propose an anti-democratic revision of the congregation’s government. In a four-part sermon preached in June 1748, Edwards argued: “’Tis the mind of God that not a mixed multitude but only select persons of distinguishing ability and integrity are fit for the business of judging causes.”<sup>58</sup> Edwards had inherited from his grandfather the practice of having cases of church discipline brought before the entire congregation of male communicants. Edwards proposed to have a council of elders, such as was the practice in Holland, Geneva, Scotland, the Presbyterian churches of the Middle colonies, and almost all Calvinistic churches. He believed that it was more consistent with scripture to have a representative judicial board that would aid the minister in governing the church. His reasons

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<sup>56</sup> Stoddard’s eulogy quotations here and below are from *God’s Awful Judgment in Breaking and Withering of the Strong Rods of a Community*, June 26, 1748 (Boston, 1748) in Edward Hickman, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*. 2 vols. (London: Ball, Arnold & Co., 1840), 2:37-40.

<sup>57</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 344.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 345-6.

for proposing this governmental revision, which predictably did not go anywhere, are not clear, but within a few months he was proposing the far more radical surgery,<sup>59</sup> pressing ahead with his plan of eliminating the “Stoddardean Way”<sup>60</sup> (see chapter 4). Further fuelling claims that Edwards was attempting to give himself dictatorial powers was the revelation to an advisory ministerial council in December of 1749 that he wanted to have veto power regarding church membership, which Grandfather Solomon Stoddard had exercised.<sup>61</sup>

In all of the above controversies – the Bad-Book affair, the salary strife and the church governance – a common strand is obvious. Edwards was increasingly sure of the rightness of his views and became increasingly intent on imposing them on the increasingly resistant congregation. His growth in self-confidence in his views was countered by his loss of confidence in the inherent power of his position, as made clear by the congregation’s loss of respect for that office. Yet the loss of positional assurance did not mitigate his sense of personal rightness. Once Edwards arrived at a conclusion he was not ready to give in. He became so certain intellectually, but increasingly insecure professionally. The intensity with which he viewed things through the lens of personal piety kept him from ordinary shrewdness about what he could achieve in the lives of those who did not share his experiences. Another contributing factor in the breakdown in Edwards’s rapport with the townspeople was his inherited view of ministerial patriarchy.<sup>62</sup> Edwards was attempting to perpetuate the role of patriarchal authority that Solomon Stoddard had exercised but in an even more extreme way.<sup>63</sup> Such traditional images were still vital to him, cosseted as he was in a ministerial family. To his parishioners, these same images had become fossils of defunct verbal conventions, mere words no longer vibrant with personal relevance.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>60</sup> Edwards’s “Narrative of the Communion Controversy” outlines the step-by-step process during which he and his parishioners became so alienated that an ecclesiastical council was finally called to assess the troubled marriage – only to ratify in a subsequent gathering the termination of it.

*Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1743-1758*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards*, 363.

<sup>62</sup> Edwards’s *Farewell Sermon* is a carefully, at times even subtly, written indictment of the people of Northampton. In the *Farewell Sermon* Edwards emphasized the minister’s position as the spiritual father of the ecclesiastical family.

William J. Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards, Theme, Motif, and Style* (College Station, Texas: A & M University Press, 1975), 115.

<sup>63</sup> His concern with order, especially with maintaining ministerial authority as its cornerstone, is principally conveyed through the family motif so prevalent throughout his work. His reliance on this motif, whether conscious or unconscious, represents a significant element in the tragedy of his career. Ibid., 142.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 142.

Throughout the 1740s, Edwards's identification with his grandfather's polity became more apparent – and more of a strategic dead end.<sup>65</sup> Edwards laboured in vain against the looming shadow of Solomon Stoddard. He could not embody the spiritual authority of his grandfather to a generation experiencing the “social and psychic dislocations that accompanied the disintegration of New England town life in the eighteenth century.”<sup>66</sup> In striving to redress this explicit threat to his authority, he assumed an excessive prophetic-apostolic role which led to the loss of acceptance of both him and his message. In vain he clung to his inherited Puritan patriarchalism to the detriment of his personal pietism which was of no use in resolving the crises. He had much to lose by attempting to reverse the policies of his grandfather. He was willing to have his reputation tarnished and to give up his and his family's home and livelihood to pursue what he knew was a personally disastrous course, because he was convinced that the logic of his conversionist theology demanded it.<sup>67</sup> The great irony in this was that the more he asserted his authority, the less that authority was accepted by the people to whom it was addressed. Edwards was a pious perfectionist who had insufficient ways of coping with the imperfections of others.

A later letter to a key adversary reveals the extent of Edwards's pain and loss. Major Joseph Hawley, a leading antagonist troubled by a guilty conscience, wrote to Edwards asking for a frank evaluation of his conduct during and after the dismissal proceedings at Northampton. Edwards did not mince his words; he obliged with an indictment of Hawley's actions. He revealed the deep personal hurt he had previously minimized and, with the zeal of a prophet, called for repentance as a way to avert final judgment.<sup>68</sup> He roundly castigated all the participants for their lack of Christian spirit and humanity while maintaining his own faithfulness as the “chief instrument in the hand of God of the salvation of their eternal souls.”<sup>69</sup> He included an extended statement which gives a clear account of how Edwards perceived their treatment of him and his subsequent sense of pain:

I was from time to time reprehended by one that was commonly chosen [moderator] of Precinct and church meetings, and chairman of their committees [Seth Pomeroy], in a very dogmatical and magisterial manner, for making so much mischief, putting the church to so much trouble. I was often charged with

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<sup>65</sup> Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton*, 147.

<sup>66</sup> Donald Weber, “The Figure of Jonathan Edwards,” *American Quarterly* 35, no.5 (Winter 1983): 557.

<sup>67</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 359-60.

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Major. Joseph Hawley, Stockbridge, November 18, 1754,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 645-6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 647.

acting only from sinister views, from stiffness of spirit, and from pride, and an arbitrary and tyrannical spirit, and a design and vain expectation of forcing all to comply with my opinion. ... The above mentioned person ... once said expressly, in a church meeting in the meetinghouse, “That it was apparent that I regarded my own temporal interest more than the good of the church; that the church had reason to think I designedly laid a snare to ensnare the church; and that they had best by all means to beware and see to it that they were not ensnared.” I am persuaded that there was not one meeting, but that this unreasonable violent spirit was apparent, and as governing and prevalent. ...In being thus, I think the whole management of the affair was exceeding provoking and abominable to God.<sup>70</sup>

Edwards’s sense of extreme offence and having been severely and wrongly maltreated is almost palpable. In this, he exhibits the characteristics of the martyr-prophet, one who is caused serious pain on account of his righteous proclamation. That he at no time felt any softening towards his antagonists is clear.

And therefore, Sir, I think you made yourself greatly guilty in the sight of God, in the part you acted in this affair; becoming especially [towards the latter] part of it, very much their leader in it ...when the matter came to be pleaded before the Council, you (I think very consistently) thrust yourself forward, and pleaded the cause with much earnestness, notwithstanding. ’Tis manifest that what you did in the affair from time to time, not only helped the people to gain their end in dismissing me, but much encouraged and promoted the spirit with which it was done; your confident, magisterial, vehement manner had a natural and direct tendency to it.<sup>71</sup>

As to your Remonstrance<sup>72</sup> to the last Council, it not only contained things that were uncharitable and censorious, by which facts were misinterpreted and overstrained, but it was full of direct, bold slanders asserted in strong terms, and delivered in very severe, opprobrious language, merely on suspicion and surmise ....a heap of direct slanders, positively asserted, all contrary to the truth of fact. I

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 649.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 650.

<sup>72</sup> The “Reflections on the Remonstrance sent to Mr Clark and Mr Edwards,” (Beinecke Library, ALS, five quarto leaves, n.d. [June 1751 – May 1752] cites a document sent by members of the First Church of Northampton to Rev. Peter Clark, to be communicated to the Council of May 1751; considering the settlement of JE over a second church in Northampton, as the “Remonstrance.” Ibid., 650 n1.

had not refused the invitation to Stockbridge, or neglected that opportunity. I had no inclination or desire to settle over these few in Northampton, but a very great opposition to it in my mind, abundantly manifested in what I continually said to them on occasion of their great and constant urgency.<sup>73</sup>

Edwards's move to Stockbridge in 1751 served to exaggerate even more his sense of alienation and isolation. His own attempts to rise above the liabilities of the location imposed upon him included attendance at commencements at Yale and New Jersey, the trips he took to Boston, his presence at ministers' conventions and his continued association with Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins,<sup>74</sup> two of his students who became intimate life-long friends and ardent followers of Edwards.<sup>75</sup> His removal from the prominence of public ministry in Northampton represented a huge loss of positional authority and influence for Edwards but he never wavered from his self-perception as a prophetic voice to his age. In fact, it seemed to confirm it and it facilitated the further consolidation and expression of his fully-fledged literary persona.

## **V      LATER PERIOD: STOCKBRIDGE AND PRESIDENCY (1751-1758)**

Edwards had long been a supporter of English missions to the Indians.<sup>76</sup> He first journeyed to the Stockbridge mission in January 1751 and remained there until March of that year. On February 22, the town called him to settle permanently as its pastor. After the "ministerial council" met in May and decided that he should accept the Stockbridge call, he wasted no time in doing so and by June 17, he had relocated and was ready to assume his duties. He was formally installed on August 8. His family moved to Stockbridge on October 18.<sup>77</sup> As soon as he moved to Stockbridge, he entered into a dispiriting series of struggles for control of the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 650-1.

<sup>74</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to John Erskine, July 5, 1750," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 348.

<sup>75</sup> Bellamy took a ministry in Bethlehem, Connecticut, which at the time was on the north-western outskirts of the colony, nearly seventy-five miles south of Northampton. For twenty-six years, beginning in December 1743, Hopkins served at a congregational church in Housatonic (later Great Barrington, Massachusetts), some forty miles south-west of Northampton but no more than ten miles from Stockbridge, which means that Edwards had the pleasure of more regular visits from Hopkins during the final years of his ministry.

Christopher W. Mitchell, "Jonathan Edwards's Scottish Connection," in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad*, 241 n11.

<sup>76</sup> Perhaps Edwards's most enduring contribution to the mission field was not his own labours at Stockbridge, but his publication of the *Life of Brainerd*, his most frequently reprinted work. Even in his lifetime, missionaries carried copies into the field with them. Rachel H. Wheeler, "Edwards as Missionary," in Stephen J. Stein, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, (Cambridge Collections Online: Cambridge University Press, 2007), (accessed August 11, 2009), 196-214. 208. DOI:10.1017/CCOLO521852900.001.

<sup>77</sup> Claghorn, *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 19.



missions programs.<sup>78</sup> Coming as they did on top of the Northampton dismissal, they kept him from a life of leisurely contemplation and writing.<sup>79</sup> At the time of Edwards's instillation there were roughly 250 Housatonic Mahicans and a handful of Mohawk Indians in residence. The English population had swelled to thirteen families – a much smaller number of souls to be responsible for than his previous placement at Northampton. During his short tenure, Edwards proved himself to be a loyal friend and defender of the Stockbridge Indians and there are at least some clues that they developed considerable respect and affection for him.<sup>80</sup>

As in any dynastic system, there were resentments and rivalries, especially among the most ambitious in the younger generation. So it was that the old rivalries quickly re-emerged. When Edwards had resided in Northampton, there had been ongoing enmity between him and his younger cousin Israel Williams, with Edwards having expressed his suspicions regarding Williams's religious principles<sup>81</sup> and Williams having called Edwards a "tyrant" who was "unsufferable" in "lording it over [his] people."<sup>82</sup> The Stockbridge Williamses had attempted to block Edwards's selection as minister,<sup>83</sup> on the grounds that he was unsociable and thus not likely to be an effective teacher, that he was too old to learn the Indians' native tongue, and "that he was a very great Bigot, for he would not admit any person into heaven, but those that agreed fully to his sentiments."<sup>84</sup> Col. Ephraim Williams Sr. had acquired much of his land from manipulative and illegal dealings with the Indians and his extended family included a number of local power brokers.<sup>85</sup> The Stockbridge Indian congregation felt increasingly antagonized by the same family that had led the charge against Edwards in

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 17-25.

<sup>79</sup> Douglas A Sweeney, ed., *Jonathan Edwards The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. 1153-1360)*. The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 23 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>80</sup> Wheeler, "Edwards as Missionary," 208.

<sup>81</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 345.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to Thomas Foxcroft, February 19/20, 1750," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 323.

<sup>83</sup> "Minutes," May 9, 1750, New England Company Records, 1685-1784. New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, Mass. in Rachel Wheeler, "'Friends to Your Souls': Jonathan Edwards's Indian Pastorate and the Doctrine of Original Sin," *The American Society of Church History* 72, no. 4 (December 2003), 743 n28.

<sup>84</sup> "Ephraim Williams, Jr. To Jonathan Ashley, May 2, 1751," in *Colonel Ephraim Williams: A Documentary Life*, ed. Wyllis Wright (Pittsfield, Massachusetts: Berkshire County Historical Society, 1970), 61. Cited in Wheeler. "'Friends to Your Souls': Jonathan Edwards's Indian Pastorate and the Doctrine of Original Sin," 743 n29.

<sup>85</sup> They had also continued their lucrative practice of dirty dealing with the Indians, exploiting the mission for personal gain and staffing its teaching post with incompetents.

See Lion G. Miles, "The Red Man Dispossessed: The Williams Family and the Alienation of Indian Land in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1736-1818," *New England Quarterly* lxxvii (March 1994): 45-76.

Northampton, which served to strengthen Edwards's sympathy for the Indians and his commitment to protect their interests.<sup>86</sup>

Early in his career Edwards had realized the value of letter writing. His commitment to the welfare of the Stockbridge Indians prompted him to re-employ his considerable skills in this area.

Indeed, the survival of the Stockbridge mission hinged much more crucially on his epistolary skills than on his homiletical skills and his efforts to save Indian souls are more amply documented in his multifaceted epistolary campaigns on behalf of the mission than in the file of sermons to the Indians. Edwards's Stockbridge correspondence includes some of the most elegant prose of his career as he lobbied the powers that supported him and controlled the conditions under which the Indian mission operated.<sup>87</sup>

Firing off letter after letter to members of the New England Company, the General Assembly, and British sponsors, Edwards fought hard for complete control of both the mission and its schools, which the Williams clan did all it could to thwart.<sup>88</sup> Despite such powerful opposition, Edwards enjoyed a great deal of public support in Stockbridge itself, among the commissioners back in Boston, and throughout the colonial leadership at large.<sup>89</sup> After two years of internecine struggle, the mission's fate was finally decided in February of 1754 by Isaac Hollis the English philanthropist (and Baptist minister) who awarded Edwards exclusive control of the Stockbridge schools.<sup>90</sup> Ultimately, the in-fighting over the direction the mission should take undermined Edwards's goal of building it into a major centre of religious education – his progressive plans were never allowed to bear much fruit.<sup>91</sup>

Letter-writing had always been a fruitful activity for Edwards. Now in something of an exiled situation at Stockbridge, Edwards's sense of alienation and powerlessness against antagonistic clan members caused him to seek epistolary support from afar. Throughout this troubled period, he corresponded with four of the most prominent ministers of the Church of

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<sup>86</sup> Wheeler, "Edwards as Missionary," 202.

<sup>87</sup> Kinnach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses 1743-1758*, 29-30 n4.

<sup>88</sup> Edwards's correspondents included Isaac Hollis, the chief sponsor of the Stockbridge mission; William Hogg, a generous Scottish benefactor; Thomas Hubbard, the speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives; the renowned Sir William Pepperrell and his wife Lady Mary Pepperrell; the Boston Commissioners of the Stockbridge mission; Jasper Mauduit, Treasurer of the New England Company in London; Secretary Andrew Oliver; and Secretary of the Province, Josiah Willard.

Claghorn, *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 493-591.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>90</sup> Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. 1153-1360)*, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Claghorn, *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 24.

Scotland: John MacLaurin of Glasgow, William McCulloch of Cambuslang, James Robe of Kilsyth, and John Erskine of Edinburgh. John Willison of Dundee and Thomas Gillespie of Carnock also figured prominently in Edwards's relationship with Scotland.<sup>92</sup> During his lifetime, he was to find no better friends than the Scottish ministers with whom he corresponded,<sup>93</sup> and they became in some sense Edwards's new patrons. None laboured longer or more diligently on Edwards's behalf than the Reverend John Erskine. He identified most fully with Edwards's writing and publishing enterprise and embodied the expanded international perspective evident among his Scottish counterparts perhaps more thoroughly than the rest.<sup>94</sup>

On July 1, 1751, writing in reply to a letter from Thomas Gillespie, Edwards began by acknowledging Gillespie's most kind, affectionate, comfortable and profitable letter. "I thank you, Sir, for your sympathy with me under my troubles, so amply testified, and the many suitable and proper considerations you suggest to me for my comfort and improvement. May God enable me to make a right improvement of them."<sup>95</sup> He then proceeded to present his analysis – historical, social, psychological and religious – of the causes leading to his dismissal. He assumed a major share of the blame. Although he venerated his grandfather Solomon Stoddard, he was convinced that his profound but detrimental influence over the town had kept him from success. He also compared himself favourably with his predecessor.<sup>96</sup>

God has been pleased in times past to bestow many special and distinguishing favors. ... Mr [Solomon] Stoddard, my grandfather; a very great man, of strong powers of mind, of great grace and great authority, of a masterly countenance, speech, and behaviour. He had great success in ministry ... but God was pleased in some respects especially to manifest his power in the weakness of his successor, there having been more remarkable awakening since his death that ever had been till then in that town. Although, since that also, a greater declension, and more awful departures from God in some respects than ever

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<sup>92</sup> O'Brien, "A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755," 819.

<sup>93</sup> Christopher W. Mitchell, "Jonathan Edwards's Scottish Connection," 225.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>95</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to the Reverend Thomas Gillespie, July 1, 1751," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 380.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

before; and so that the last minister has had more to humble him than either of his predecessors. May the effect be answerable to God's just expectations!<sup>97</sup>

In Edwards's mind (and in the minds of many others), the measure of a New England clergyman hung on the number and degree of awakenings that occurred during his tenure. On the plus side, Edwards could console himself with the fact that his awakenings exceeded his grandfather's. He probably considered that this factor alone should have influenced the outcome of his battles with the Northamptonites. On the other hand, the congregation's "greater declensions" and "awful departures from God" may have kept his over-weening sense of pride in check. He continued:

And here I desire it may be observed that I would be far from so laying all the blame of the sorrowful things that have come to pass to the people, as to suppose that I have no cause of self-reflection and humiliation before God on this occasion. I am sensible that it becomes me to look on what has lately happened; as an awful frown of heaven on me, as well as on the people. God knows the wickedness of my heart and the great and sinful deficiencies and offenses which I have been guilty of in the course of my ministry at Northampton. I desire that God would discover them to me more and more, and that now he would effectually humble me and mortify my pride and self-confidence, and empty me entirely of myself, and make me to know how that I deserve to be cast away as an abominable branch, and as a vessel wherein is no pleasure; and, if it may consist with his holy will, sanctify me, and make me a vessel more meet for my Master's use, and yet improve me as an instrument of his glory and the good of the souls of mankind.<sup>98</sup>

Part of the price Edwards paid for the resolution to the conflict in Stockbridge was an ebb in his writing schedule and a marked decline in his health. While he managed to produce a tremendous amount of writing at Stockbridge, when compared to the literary pace he had established in the 1740s, the early 1750s were lean years for Edwards's scholarship.<sup>99</sup> He did however publish two substantial treatises, *Misrepresentations Corrected* (1752) and *Freedom of the Will* (1754). He wrote the first of these – little more than an extension of the arguments made in his *Humble Inquiry* of 1749 – before his Stockbridge troubles began to intensify, and

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>99</sup> Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards The "Miscellanies"* (Entry Nos. 1153-1360), 4.

he had been working on *Freedom of the Will* (1754) since the mid-1740s. He drafted an unusually small number of Miscellanies in the early 1750s. Understandably, he found little time to work in these notebooks. In 1751, he drafted entries on the will and related topics. By August of 1752, he had started his final draft of *Freedom of the Will*. By then he had begun complaining of “the multitude of affairs which have been continually pressed on my mind.”<sup>100</sup> Moreover, as he explained to Erskine in November, his work on *Freedom of the Will* “was soon broke off; and such have been my extraordinary avocations and hindrances, that I have not had time to set pen to paper about this matter since.”<sup>101</sup>

Edwards was not one to give up. Just as his letters reveal much of the anguish he experienced over his dismissal and treatment at Northampton, many of them also reveal his ongoing commitment to his literary endeavours. With his loss of positional function and power, he acknowledged his determination to proceed in his study and, if possible, to resume his writing. Thus, his loss removed him from the distractions of public office and was ironically to liberate him to the pursuit of the activity which would ultimately establish his legacy.

An end is put for the present by these troubles to the studies I was before engaged in, and my design of writing against Arminianism. I had made considerable preparation, and was deeply engaged in the prosecution of this design, before I was rent off from it by these difficulties. And if ever God should give me opportunity, I would again resume that affair.<sup>102</sup>

Not until 1753 did Edwards resume his former prolific literary production. During the first half of that year he finished *Freedom of the Will*. As he exulted to Erskine in April, “After many hindrances, delays, and interruptions, divine providence has so far favoured me ... that I have almost finished the first draft.”<sup>103</sup> He also worked at length in his manuscript notebook entitled “Controversies,” first on “Efficacious Grace” (a theme that Edwards had written about for years in a series of notebooks on “Moral agency,” whose title he changed to “Efficacious Grace” after using their contents in *Freedom of the Will*), and then on “The

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend John Erskine,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 539-41.

<sup>102</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to John Erskine, July 5, 1750,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 355.

<sup>103</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend John Erskine, April 14, 1753,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 594.

Nature of True Virtue” (an interest fuelled, perhaps, by his feud with the morally challenged Williams clan). Meanwhile, he picked up his pace in the *Miscellanies* as well.<sup>104</sup>

Somewhat tragically, this productive creativity was soon undermined by his perennial Achilles heel. No sooner had Edwards returned to his earlier scholarly routine than he succumbed to “the longest and most tedious sickness that ever I had in my life.” On April 15, 1755, he related the following in a letter to Erskine:

I have been followed with fits of the ague, which came upon me about the middle of last July, and were for a long time very severe and exceedingly wasted my flesh and strength, so that I became like a skeleton. I had several intermissions of the fits by the use of the Peruvian bark; but they never wholly left me till about the middle of last January. In the meantime, I had several times attempted to write letters to some of my friends about affairs of importance; but found that I could bear but little of such writing. Once, in attempting to write a letter to Mr. Aaron Burr, a fit of the ague came upon me while I was writing; so that I was obliged to lay by my pen. When my fits left me, they left me in a poor, weak state, all over bloated; so that I feared whether I was not going into dropsy. I am still swelled, and much overrun with scorbutic maladies. Nevertheless, I have of late gradually gained strength.<sup>105</sup>

In spite of his lingering “scorbutic maladies” (symptoms caused by scurvy), Edwards was on the mend by spring and able once again to do some writing. His trials continued, however. Just as he was recovering from this illness, he had a life-threatening experience. In April 1755, on a trip to East Windsor to visit his family, he received a “great hurt” by what he described as “a dangerous fall from my horse, the horse pitching heels over head with his whole weight upon me.”<sup>106</sup> Physically, Edwards was a wreck, and increasingly frustrated by all the time that was wasting away.

Despite his numerous tribulations, Edwards produced a prodigious amount of scholarship during the final years of his life. In the spring of 1755, he got back up on his literary horse and rode so hard that during the remainder of his tenure at the mission, a period of two and a

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<sup>104</sup> Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 1153-1360), 5.

<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend John Erskine” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 662.

<sup>106</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend Thomas Foxcroft,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 668.

half years, he generated well over a thousand pages of scholarly prose.<sup>107</sup> In addition to most of the Miscellanies of this period, he extended his “Controversies” notebook, completed his manuscript book on “Faith” and finished three published treatises – *Original Sin* (1758) and the posthumously printed *Two Dissertations (The End for Which God Created the World and The Nature of True Virtue*, published together in 1765). Edwards also laid plans at this time for his unpublished *Harmony of the Old and New Testament*<sup>108</sup> and designed his unfinished *magnum opus* on the *History of the Work of Redemption*.<sup>109</sup>

So, in a further example of irony, all the losses implicit in the Northampton experience came ultimately to be seen by Edwards as significant gain. The *Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World* is in several respects reminiscent of *God Glorified in the Work of Redemption* (1731). Basic to both of these works is the tenet of God’s absolute sovereignty and humanity’s total dependence.<sup>110</sup> There is, however, a distinct qualitative difference between the two works. In the rigid prose of *God Glorified*, Edwards emphasized the distance between humanity and God, the gap between human dereliction and divine sublimity. During the years of ministry, this sense of distance narrowed in his writings. In the *Dissertation*, he explains that “man is infinitely, nearly, and closely united to God.”<sup>111</sup> In personal terms, the work may have struck Edwards as very special indeed:

Was this not a sign from God, another clue to the minister’s own spiritual condition, a further unfolding of his personal narrative? Did not divine light and inspiration shine forth through these writings? Indeed, just as creation is the “emanation and true external expression of God’s internal glory and fullness” – by internal glory is meant God’s understanding and will – so too Edwards’s manuscript represents external expressions of his verbal inner self (understanding and will), the source of these writings.<sup>112</sup>

Surely now his exile at Stockbridge would have seemed less a divine indictment than the fulfilment of a hope he had expressed in his letter to Thomas Gillespie (July 1, 1751), that his experience at the mission would “improve me as an instrument of his glory, and the good of

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<sup>107</sup> Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 1153-1360), 7.

<sup>108</sup> On this project see Kenneth P. Minkema, “The Other Unfinished ‘Great Work,’ Jonathan Edwards, Messianic Prophecy, and the ‘Harmony of the Old and New Testaments,’” in Stephen J. Stein, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Writings: Text, Context, Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 52-65.

<sup>109</sup> John F. Wilson, “Jonathan Edwards’s Notebooks for a History of the Work of Redemption,” in *Jonathan Edwards A History of the Work of Redemption*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 9 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 543-56.

<sup>110</sup> Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards, Theme, Motif, and Style*, 132.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

the souls of mankind.”<sup>113</sup> In this statement in particular, and in this final writing in general, Edwards’s most mature expression of his prophetic persona can be seen.

The final six weeks of Edwards’s life saw him receive public restoration, in an honour which he deemed to be somewhat too great. In the midst of continual concerns about the Indian missions and Indian wars, he received an invitation to succeed his late son-in-law Aaron Burr as the president of the College of New Jersey. His response to the trustees of the College on October 19, 1757, ranks as one of the most illuminating in his corpus.<sup>114</sup> It tells us much about Edwards as a person, about his own estimation of his abilities and temperament at the end of his life, and about the projects he was working on to fulfil his life of study and reflection. He admitted that his desire was to stay in Stockbridge. “My heart is so much in these studies,” he wrote to Stockton and the other trustees, “that I cannot find it in my heart to be willing to be put myself into an incapacity to pursue them any-more, in the future part of my life, to such a degree as I must, if I undertake ... the office of a president.” Besides his projected *History of the Work of Redemption* and *Harmony of the Old and New Testament*, he noted that he had “also many other things in hand, in some of which I have made great progress.” He continued, “Some of these things if divine providence favour, I should be willing to attempt a publication of.” Further, “So far as I myself am able to judge of what talents I have, for benefiting my fellow creatures by word, I think I can write better than I can speak.”<sup>115</sup> Stockbridge had provided the time and the place where he could capitalize on what was, in essence, his outstanding talent.

Edwards had by now become firmly convinced that his talent was writing. The shaping of his predominantly literary persona was fully manifest. When he was invited to fill the vacant presidency at New Jersey in 1757, he initially demurred on the grounds that “my engaging in this business will not well consist, with those views, and that course of employ in my study, which have long engaged, and swallowed up my mind, and been the chief entertainment and delight of my life.”<sup>116</sup> However, in the tradition of New England’s Congregationalists, Edwards convened a council of regional pastors to seek God’s will in this affair. As he related to Gideon Hawley, “the Council proceeded to hear and judge of the matter and

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<sup>113</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend Thomas Gillespie, July 1, 1751,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 380.

<sup>114</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, Stockbridge, October 19, 1757,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 725-30.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 726-7.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 725-6.



unanimously determined that my call was clear to go, etc. I am therefore by the will of God about to set out on my journey in a few days, being greatly pressed to go speedily by letters after letters from the Trustees.”<sup>117</sup> For Edwards, God had spoken and he obeyed, despite his genuine reluctance.

When they [the council] published their judgment and advice to Mr. Edwards and his people, he appear’d uncommonly mov’d and affected with it, and fell into tears on the occasion; ... and soon after said to the gentlemen, who had given their advice, that it was a matter of wonder to him, that they could so easily ... get over the objections he had made against his removal, to be head of a college; which appear’d great and weighty to him.<sup>118</sup>

These were not tears of joy. If Edwards’s professional career could be described as coming to a triumphant conclusion as he moved from a frontier post to Nassau Hall, now an internationally known author with even greater projects in mind, his career as pastor, preacher, and missionary drew to a quiet and rather sombre close as he took his leave of Stockbridge.<sup>119</sup>

Shortly after his arrival at the College at Princeton, a smallpox epidemic broke out and he chose to be inoculated. Following a short illness from the somewhat new and controversial procedure, he died on March 22, 1758, two months after he had assumed the presidency.<sup>120</sup> Some might say, “What a waste,” yet the legacy of Jonathan Edwards had been firmly established in his corpus of writings which constituted the lasting expression of his philosophical and theological persona.

## VI CONCLUSION

This review of the life of Jonathan Edwards has traced the development of his persona during the progressive formative periods of his public career. His inherited context of colonial American Puritanism pre-conditioned his conscious development of a ministerial persona, deeply impressed by the exemplary models he studied and emulated during the early days of his quite sheltered start to adult life. His natural tendency was to quest after the personal holiness which had so enriched his individual life since his youth. However, the assumption

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<sup>117</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to the Reverend Gideon Hawley,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 737.

<sup>118</sup> Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards*, 79.

<sup>119</sup> Kimnach, *Jonathan Edwards Sermons and Discourses, 1743-1758*, 37.

<sup>120</sup> Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 1153-1360), 9.

of public office carried with it a portfolio of responsibility for others which he sought to execute in terms of his inherited tradition of ministerial positional power, shaped by the deep impress of his conversion experience and subsequent conversion theology.

The three phases of this development and expression can be seen as three stages of an essential and formative conflict in which Edwards was confronted by the conflicting demands of his authority and the alien forces ranged against the various expressions of that authority. The inherited Puritan concepts of dogma, ecclesiology and society were in contention with Edwards's natural inclination towards naïve personal piety. The inherited authority of Puritanism required public actions to perpetuate conventional views and ideals and to influence society. This involved Edwards in an engagement in moral and civil issues as an imposed authority. He did so first in a consciously Stoddardean way, but eventually in a way that expressed his own increasing sense of spiritual rightness and authority. In this, he progressively developed a quasi-apostolic persona. On the other hand, his innate personal desire for holiness led him to seek God's glory in a life of earnest meditation and the personal enjoyment of God's sovereignty and beauty. The two strands merged in Edwards as he came to see more and more the need for his own experiential conversion to be the cornerstone of true religion. Yet in attempting to overcome the opposing forces of inherited and flawed dogma, he initially sought to use the inherited means of positional authority, which ironically was the ultimate cause of the congregation's rejection of his message and authority and led to his alienation from the position of public prominence he had previously enjoyed. The inevitable inter-personal conflicts that ensued resulted in dramatic losses for Edwards – of positional power and prominence.

It is an irony that Edwards had to lose the public quasi-apostolic position with its formal authority and power in order to gain the liberty to capitalize more fully on his literary ambitions. His attempts to impose his growing apostolic authority at Northampton led to a universal refusal to submit to that authority, which in turn led him to find a different place and means for its expression. It is perhaps the great irony of Edwards's life and legacy that it was this loss and gain aspect that led to the ultimate shaping of his persona and to its fullest expression in his literary works rather than in his pastoral ministry. The prophetic-apostolic persona that he sought to develop at Northampton found its true expression in the corpus of his writing, through which he has exerted far more authoritative influence than he ever did as a public ministerial officer. By the time he reached the College of New Jersey (later

Princeton), he had firmly established his position as a leading thinker and writer – a potent voice for the proclamation of his core message, the sovereignty, glory and excellency of God and Christ.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING EDWARDS THE MAN

#### I INTRODUCTION

We know much about Jonathan Edwards: his philosophy, his theology, his epistemology. What we do not know much about is his person.<sup>1</sup> The object of this study has not primarily been to present a recital of the life and times of Jonathan Edwards. Rather, it has been an attempt to penetrate into the depths of what made Edwards the man he was and to inquire into the process of the development of that person. It is thus an attempt to discern those personal dimensions which were instrumental in defining the man and in shaping his success. While such personal development may be discerned to some degree in his life and ministry, it is essentially in his personal writings that we have consistent and graphic access to the innermost passions, fears, hopes and despairs of the man.

From his writings, it is clear that this formative process was not mere accident but rather it was a deliberate, intentional and strategic development orchestrated by Edwards himself. It is true that he was influenced by many factors, some of them beyond his own control. Yet this study has shown that, throughout his life and work, Edwards was increasingly focussed on intentionally shaping his own persona: that public face which he resolved to present and ultimately which came to be the “real Edwards.” Starting from the motivational message which he believed he had to proclaim, he consciously set up and progressively refined a model of a minister that he desired to project, and he strategically adopted a variety of means by which he ultimately shaped his persona in such a way that the message came to dominate and to shape him. This study has analysed a number of key factors in the development of the Edwards persona. Now, this concluding chapter will draw together the various strands of the study to synthesise the motivation, the aim, the means and the results of the self-fashioning which Edwards executed with progressive efficiency throughout his life.

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<sup>1</sup> The Tercentenary writings acknowledged this lack of familiarity with the inner self of Edwards. See Harry S. Stout et al., eds., *Jonathan Edwards at 300: Essays on the Tercentenary of his Birth* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005). Recently, there has been more activity in exploring this dimension. This work addresses one such dimension.

## II THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EDWARDS PERSONA

(a) *Motivation: why did Edwards want to fashion himself in a particular way?*

The question of what motivated Edwards in his self-fashioning involves both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Of fundamental importance to everything in his life were his inherently contemplative nature and the intensity of his personal conversion experience, which predisposed him to achieving a life that would be pleasing to God. At the same time, he was progressively confronted with a number of external elements which were instrumental in defining the detailed nature that such a life would take.

Even as a young boy, Edwards was possessed of a deeply contemplative and pious nature, wherein he would constantly seek God's presence and pleasure. In his introspective youth, he came to be completely dissatisfied with his poor spiritual state. In his "Personal Narrative" he documented his struggle against what he called "the horrible doctrine of God's sovereignty" and his habit of returning "like a dog to his vomit ... in sin" that left him bereft of inner peace. These factors set him on his quest for a solution. He was so desperate that he resolved to "part with all things in the world for an interest in Christ." This led to a complete submission to God and a consequent reordering of his priorities. However, no longer was this a sense of being in subjection to an authoritarian and oppressive God, but it became a sense of liberation to enjoy the presence of an excellent and loving God. Thus was precipitated his celebrated conversion in which he experienced a "sense of the glory of the divine being, a new sense, quite different" from any previous religious experience. His view on God's sovereignty was completely transformed and he then saw God as an "excellent Being" in whom he longed to be "wrapt up" and "swallowed up." His objections to God's sovereignty dissolved into a "delightful conviction" about the justice and rightness of God's Sovereignty. This initial experience and similar quasi-epiphanic experiences of God in nature fostered in him a desire to model himself into what he believed the "complete Christian" should be. While this conversion experience did not provide the concrete details of what that model should be, it was to establish the life-long motivational basis that both undergirded and circumscribed all that he would do and be. His overarching motivation would always be to gain an interest in Christ.

The external factors of Edwards's life helped him to define just what sort of person he would strive to become. Such elements as his intended ecclesiastical career, the numerous "aliens" he had inevitably to confront, the religious revivals and their ramifications, and the pivotal

conflicts in which he became embroiled all served to motivate him to become a certain kind of person. Given the family context of his birth and upbringing, it was inevitable that Edwards would become yet another cleric in the Stoddard/Mather clan, just like his father and grandfather before him. Associated with this family tradition, the ecclesiastical context of New England dictated that this only son of Timothy and Esther Stoddard Edwards would take up his position as a minister in his late teens under the watchful eye of his forebears whose perceived successes in the pastorate provided him with a standard to live up to. Heir to the Northampton congregation, Jonathan Edwards found that his grandfather Solomon Stoddard had set the bar particularly high. After all, Stoddard had been regarded as a “prophet and father” to all, a “Peter here among the Disciples ... among the first for light and integrity, for knowledge and great judgment; for faith and love ... and for zeal and boldness in the cause of Truth and Holiness.” He was “favoured with a more than ordinary presence of God in his work, and many seals on his ministry, in the course of which there were three remarkable seasons, in which the Spirit of God so moved upon the hearts of his people.” The young Jonathan was not only challenged by the fame of Stoddard but he was also inspired by his predecessor to sustain the kind of pastoral leadership he had thus inherited. Standing on the threshold of his ministerial career, he contemplated what sort of person he would need to be to emulate his illustrious grandfather as he took up Stoddard’s “mantle” at Northampton.

However, even before he assumed that mantle, there had been some discomfiting issues in Edwards’s life that also motivated him to take a stand and in so doing to portray himself in a particular light. While undertaking his formal education, the deeply contemplative and philosophical Edwards had immersed himself in the literature of the emerging British/Continental Enlightenment and fully understood the serious challenges posed by Enlightenment ideas to the Christian faith. Enlightenment thinkers, he concluded, had developed an all encompassing programmatic estrangement between God and humanity. Deists had adopted a rational religion based on reason and nature; mechanical philosophers had distanced God from the created order by constructing the world as a huge machine running like a clock; Arminians had credited themselves with the final word on their salvation and moral sense theorists had detached the moral system from God. Edwards had come to view all these new ideas as heresies that were threatening the purity of the colony and undermining true religion. Even at this early age as he prepared himself for high office, it was not in Jonathan Edwards’s nature to allow such threats to go uncontested. In taking a

stand against these alien isms, Edwards had begun to give inchoate shape to the person he was to develop into more definitively as he progressed.

On the other hand, it was the revivals which allowed Edwards to add a more positive and active aspect to his religious motivation. In a sense, Puritanism was itself a vast extended revival movement. By the early eighteenth century, Edwards's Puritan forebears were convinced that revival should be the church's top concern. In common with many others, Jonathan Edwards held that the measure of a New England clergyman hinged on the number and degree of awakenings that occurred during his tenure. According to Jonathan, Northampton parishioners had experienced more awakenings under his grandfather Solomon Stoddard than East Windsor had under his father Timothy Edwards. As Edwards followed in their footsteps he no doubt toyed with the implications for his upcoming career. Could he be the sort of person whose ministry God would bless with numerous "harvests" like his father and grandfather before him? His desire for revivalist success did much to motivate him to be an assiduous chronicler and influential interpreter of such spiritual outpourings.

Perhaps it was the pre-existent conflicted atmosphere of the manse that the young Edwards had experienced that most pointedly motivated him to establish himself in the way he did. The particular lesson that he learned early in the East Windsor parsonage was that ecclesiastical ministry could easily be a martyr's vocation. His father had waged constant warfare with the East Windsor congregation for even the minimum respect and authority that God had intended him to have. There had been frequent open conflict over his salary and over his right to absolute control within the church. Timothy Edwards had been especially sensitive about the morality and discipline of young people and demanded an absolute veto on admission to full membership and church discipline, and even complete control of the choice of topics to be discussed by the church at their meetings. Jonathan Edwards noted that while his father had not mastered the art of wielding authority at East Windsor, his grandfather Solomon Stoddard had the Northampton congregation completely under his control. So it was that he set out to establish himself as a minister in the Stoddardean mould as a means of exercising most authoritative control in the church. While this defined a *status quo* that he hoped to maintain, it was also to cause great crises in due course.

(b) *Aims: what sort of persona did Edwards set out to fashion?*

As both a product of his inherent temperament and a natural outworking of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors at work in his life, Edwards systematically set out to design the

model of the person he should become. As with his motivations, his aims were also shaped by a combination of received tradition and expectation, external elements which were neither inherited nor expected yet which were very influential in his formation, and his deeply entrenched personal piety and spiritual experience.

In terms of the development of a ministerial persona, Edwards was the recipient of a traditional stereotype. This was the starting point for his deliberate self-shaping. He was familiar with all the endowments that the office of minister conferred. Congregations called and ordained their ministers, and once ordained, ministers alone could speak for God in public assemblies and the laity had to submit to their teachings. New Englanders had high expectations of those who occupied the office of minister and along with the prestige of high office came enormous responsibilities and duties to be performed. Certain material benefits also accompanied ministerial appointments, such as Edwards's initial allocation of "ten acres of land for pasture and another forty acres farther from town that could be used for income; an honourable and suitable maintenance according to the dignity of office" and sufficient funds to acquire a "Mansion house, barn and home lot." This ample provision for the young Edwards was a clear statement of the respect due to the office of minister, as he embarked on his ministerial vocation – a respect that Edwards always assumed as a right by virtue of his office. From the outset, Edwards saw his future in the light of all that the office of minister conferred upon him. Northampton required the services of a larger than life appointee, an enlightened authoritative and powerful cleric whose political and clerical connections could fill the shoes of the previous "pope" of the Connecticut Valley. He would speak to the people and for the people and his voice would be heeded. He would be the "oracle" of God, the "trumpet of the Lord" as Edwards put it, and as such parishioners would accept his teaching. While there was a certain naiveté in this aim, it was a strong element in his make-up, which inevitably led to tensions that would themselves require serious modification in practice.

Without question, the most dramatic and influential external agent in shaping the personal model of piety to which Edwards would aspire was Sarah Pierpont. While their extraordinary relationship could not have formed any part of a predetermined spiritual stereotype, it had a profound impact on Edwards as he sought to understand and to articulate that understanding of genuine spiritual experience. When Edwards moved to New Haven to complete his undergraduate studies in 1719, he was in a state of inner turmoil. There he met the juvenile Sarah whose life presented him with a picture of the Christian faith that he had never before



encountered. For several years he watched her and was so entranced by this beautiful girl that he felt inspired to write a tribute to her in which he noted the key aspects of her religious experience that he lacked. She appeared to be “beloved of that almighty Being,” who in some way or other invisible, “comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight.” She seemed not to have a care in the world and expected to be “raised out of the world and caught up into heaven.” and to be “ravished with his love, favour and delight, forever.” She had a strange “sweetness in her mind;” she had “uncommon purity in her affections;” she could not be persuaded to do anything “thought wrong or sinful.” She would sometimes go about singing sweetly, from place to place,” loving “to be alone, and to wander in the fields and on the mountains,” seeming to have “someone invisible always conversing with her.”<sup>2</sup> In Sarah, even before their marriage, Edwards had found what he had been looking for. Not only did he long for her blissful state, he became infatuated with this beautiful girl in whom he saw the embodiment of his saintly ideal. Sarah Pierpont Edwards’s ongoing challenging ecstatic episodes throughout her life provided Jonathan with direction for his continuing quest for personal wholeness. She provided for him a living, constant and experiential model which he set as a target for his personal attainment.

It was, however, Edwards’s own contemplative nature, his sense of personal piety and his intense personal experience that gave most shape to the sort of person he set out to be. The expectations of office and the impress of Sarah’s spirituality were woven into the fabric of his own experience, which in turn became the yardstick of what he judged as genuine and thus to be desired. In 1721, he desperately sought salvation “in a manner that he never had before.” He made a commitment to “part with all things in the world for an interest in Christ.” This proved to be a decisive and thereafter controlling turning point in his life. Shortly after making this commitment, Edwards noticed that “there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before.”<sup>3</sup> Edwards would return again and again to the fields and woods where his “sense of divine things” increased and had more “inward sweetness.” Creation itself seemed to be altered: “there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God’s excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “On Sarah Pierpont,” in George S. Claghorn, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 16 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 789-90.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 792 -3.

sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature.”<sup>4</sup> Edwards spent increasing amounts of time walking alone in nature, meditating, praying, and conversing with God in much the same manner as the young Sarah Pierpont had done. The enjoyment he felt was “of an exceedingly different kind” from what he had experienced as a boy. They were “more inward, pure, soul-animating and refreshing.”<sup>5</sup> Edwards found these initial revelations enlightening and inspirational, transforming and empowering, and he valued their effect on his person so much that he frequently returned to nature to refresh his experiences in order to maintain their effect. This intense personal spirituality was to be the mark of the persona that Edwards sought so earnestly to cultivate.

(c) *Means: how did Edwards go about shaping his desired persona?*

While in some ways the issues of motivation and aim may be inferential, the issue of the means of self-fashioning developed and employed by Edwards is far more concrete and has formed a large part of the focus of this research. These means included in the first instance the standard means available to anyone in his position – education, tradition, family – which extended to Edwards’s efforts to increase his standing within the academy and abroad. Of greater significance, however, was the experiential development that he progressively underwent in terms of his personal disciplines, his growing personal piety and the interpersonal conflicts in which he was at times passionately and personally engaged. Ultimately, this mix of tradition, piety and conflicts was to lead him to his consummate mastery of literature as the major means by which his persona was established.

(i) *Standard Means*

The standard means of achieving and expressing an official public identity were classical education and traditional social connections, both of which were readily accessible for Edwards. His intellectually vital household was dominated by the cultural aura of Harvard, from where his father and grandfather had graduated. His grooming for public office and ministry began early under the tutelage of his father from whom he had received his elementary schooling in the school run as a part of his regular duties as a minister. Edwards began his college life in 1716 with a formal training in the classics; he continued Latin and Greek, undertook Hebrew, and added logic, physics, geometry, astronomy and metaphysics.<sup>6</sup> Edwards engaged all the contemporary issues in theology and philosophy, including orthodox

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 794.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 794-95.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas H. Johnson, “Jonathan Edwards’s Background of Reading,” in *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, 28 (1931): 197-8.

Calvinism, Deism, Arminianism, British empiricism and Continental rationalism. He became a ravenous reader. His extensive personal reading was promoted at Yale and expanded in his senior year by the donation of books covering every major branch of learning. This brought him into full contact with the polite “republic of letters” of the European Enlightenment and other “learned journals.” Edwards’s appetite for knowledge led him to stay abreast of the latest developments in many fields of enquiry. He read all books from which he could hope to get any help in his pursuit of knowledge that would prepare him for a life of study, writing and ministry. These studies prepared him well for his growing public engagement in debates on these vexing issues. It was his acknowledged mastery of such a wide scope of scholarship that gained him a high degree of authority in public discourse, an advantage that Edwards used skilfully to enhance his public profile.

The dominant formative influence on the young minister Edwards was the familial example of his father and grandfather and other divines within the context of the Puritan/Calvinist tradition. At times unwittingly, at times consciously, but always conscientiously, Edwards imbibed and adopted their example and willingly submitted to and utilised his inherited traditions and the establishment in which he was becoming progressively enmeshed. His very strong family inheritance of social connections, civic prominence and ministerial power not only laid the basis of his understanding of the minister’s office, it also became the means by which he would advance his career. Edwards’s move to Northampton in 1726 gave him access to the Stoddard-Williams allegiances and kinship ties that connected him with other powerful clergy, merchants, magistrates and politicians. His growing prominence as a member of a broadening social and cultural elite served him well in the shaping of his public profile as an authoritative voice.

By way of extending this traditional base of influence, Edwards strove to enhance his reputation by self-promotion within the wider academy and in his correspondence with influential overseas clerics and scholars. New Englanders of the 1700s subscribed to British and European journals to keep alive their philosophical interests. The “republic of letters” and other “learned journals” provided a forum for discussion. Edwards learnt about new books published, new ideas advanced and the state of the argument on any given issue from these journals. His reading log has many references to the *New Memoirs of Literature* and to the *Republic of Letters*. He was familiar with *The Spectator* and was enamoured with Richard Steele whose writings he collected. He also noted favourably the genre of philosophical

dialogue employed by the Third Earl of Shaftesbury and of “that book of Mr David Hume’s” he wrote, “I am glad of an opportunity to read such corrupt books; especially when written by men of considerable genius that I may have an idea of the notions that prevail in our nation.”<sup>7</sup> Such “corrupt books” provided him with the ideas that he felt compelled to refute. Edwards was very interested in the new “polite” culture of reading and dialogue with others involved in these early modern intellectual movements was an integral part of his burgeoning literary enterprise.

Letter writing within the transatlantic literary community was a necessity in an age before the convenience of modern communications. This practice was taken up by the Puritan transatlantic network that existed between 1620 and 1730. Writers formulated their opinions within a transatlantic context and those opinions in turn established a number of views and patterns of response within that same transatlantic world. Edwards himself was actively involved in a letter-writing network that had a core of leading ministers including Benjamin Colman and Thomas Prince, Sr. of New England; James Robe, William McCulloch, John McLaurin, and John Erskine of Scotland; and English ministers Watts, Guyse and Doddridge.<sup>8</sup> This network had a significant influence on Edwards and his ministry, as it promoted and published his many literary endeavours and provided him with a sounding board, mutual support and encouragement, and wise counsel when he needed it.

## (ii) *Experiential Development*

Edwards was from the outset a thoroughly self-disciplined man and his personal disciplines never abandoned him. His conversion experience with its quasi-epiphanic revelations and his subsequent ministerial expectations propelled him on a rigorous course of deliberate self-improvement. He began compiling resolutions and making entries in his *Diary*. These writings demonstrate the seriousness of Edwards’s devotion to his personal reformation. They portray his newly formed converted self and his determination to reconstruct every sphere of his life in the light of that experience. His *Resolutions* show concern with values. His *Diary* records his efforts to keep and to assess these resolutions. His resolutions fell into several categories. Some dealt with specific habits such as improving time (no. 5); maximizing study (no. 11); controlling diet (nos. 20, 40); reading the scriptures (no. 28); and combating listlessness (no. 61). Others, going more deeply into the self, pertained to examining motives,

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Letter to the Reverend John Erskine,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 679.

<sup>8</sup> Susan O’Brien, “A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-175,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (October 1986): 819-20.

tracing back an action to the original intention, designs and ends of it (nos. 23, 24). More deeply still, another category of entries related to being, as Edwards put it in no. 63, “a complete Christian ... glorifying God in every thought, word and deed,” or to his resolution “to live with all my might, while I do live,” as he declared in no. 6. This meant living every moment as if it were “the last hour of my life” (no. 7). In the preamble he noted, “Remember to read over these Resolutions once a week.” In separate entries he exhorted himself to review his behaviour “at the end of every day, week, month, and year. Wherein I could possibly in any respect have done better (nos. 37, 41).” It was this sort of constant and intense self-scrutiny that marked much of his personal development.

Edwards cross-referenced his *Resolutions* and *Diary*. His *Diary* contains frequent references to a “weekly account,” that seems to have been a tabulation of duties performed, with higher numerical figures indicating greater fidelity to his self-imposed regimen. He began his *Diary* in late 1722, shortly after his *Resolutions*, with nine entries from 1722, twenty-five from 1724, seven from 1725, and six spanning the years 1726-1735. The most represented year is 1723, with entries on 103 days. A feature of Edwards’s *Diary* is its clinical nature. Edwards studied himself the way he had studied spiders. Several recurrent themes in the *Diary* suggest much about his temperament, his self-perception, and the content of his inner spiritual life. One was a concern with “enemies:” the Williamsses and those he regarded as the enemies of the true church – Arminians, Deists, and Catholics. He also worried in a later entry on August 24, 1723, that he had “not practiced quite right about revenge.” He feared he had indulged in a “secret sort of revenge.” He committed himself to introspection: “Whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, [I intend] to trace it back, till I come to the original cause.” He even resolved to examine his dreams for the light they might shed on his motives. Anticipating a clerical career, he left no stone unturned in his quest for transformation.

As a part of this overall self-discipline, Edwards also chronicled the progress of his personal piety, which practice doubled as an exercise in personal accountability and as a tool in public formation. He disciplined himself to write down every thought that entered his mind and revisit it in order to inspire further thoughts. His “Personal Narrative” was constructed in this manner from his *Diary* and other notes. It was more than a merely personal reflection, however. As an expression of his self-perceived role as an authoritative shaper of public religion, he saw his “Personal Narrative” as having a didactic use and had high hopes that his readers would adopt his exemplary experience. It provided yet another opportunity to teach

what is false and what is true in religious experience, giving another form to the arguments he carried on elsewhere. God's absolute sovereignty, personal inability, a new sense of the heart and the idea of being swallowed up by the beauty, excellency and holiness of God were the essence of Edwards's piety and the platform on which he took his stand. Thus his personal piety formed the basis of his thought and his writings. Edwards deliberately and strategically projected himself as the model saint in his "Personal Narrative," portraying his journey towards personal wholeness, and his arrival thereat, as a challenge for others.

Edwards's emergence as a significant figure in the New England ecclesiastical establishment involved him in a number of campaigns and controversies. Whether the conflict was between his personal experience and his received tradition or between his philosophical worldview and that of the British and Continental Enlightenment thinkers, Edwards conveyed his convictions via his writings. Conflict between those who supported the Awakenings and those who condemned them because of their excesses was addressed through sermons, public lectures and treatises, all of which were written down for publication. Conflict with his parishioners' lax practices and his extended family's lax ethics were all dealt with in his letters and by chronicling in detail the course of events. Edwards spent enormous amounts of time in his study, day and night, year after year, writing thousands upon thousands of pages with a quill pen.<sup>9</sup> He industriously gathered his knowledge from disparate sources in his fight against what he regarded as the "many bold attempts made against Christ, and the religion he taught."<sup>10</sup> Throughout his career he struggled with the relation of words to the ideas they represent and sought verbal precision that effectively tied his opponents in knots and destroyed their arguments, to the point of obsessiveness:

In all intellectual disputes Edwards beat down his opponents, demolishing even the slightest contradictions. He had to prove himself right in every detail. Even in his non-combative writings, his arguments were exhaustive. What often appears as repetition was part of a massive effort to block every conceivable loophole. The careful definitions, the close reasoning, the piling up of proofs and illustrations were the natural ways of his thorough and fastidious mind. The truth

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<sup>9</sup> Philip F. Gura, "Jonathan Edwards in American Literature," *Early American Literature* 39, no. 1 (2004): 147-66.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to the Reverend Thomas Foxcroft," in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 695.

had to be expressed immaculately and in perfect order, leaving no gaps for error to invade.<sup>11</sup>

Yet despite the strength of his confidence in his positional authority and the extraordinary precision of his adversarial argument, it was the overwhelming personal power of his social and congregational antagonists at Northampton that led to the demise of that very positional authority on which he had so long rested. The political defeats so suffered led him to re-shape the means he had used to fashion himself, since his office was no longer an effective vehicle. In a sense, he was forced into a strategic corner, but it was to prove to be a corner where he would find his real authority.

### (iii) *Literature*

The ultimate key to understanding the means by which Edwards so effectively shaped his persona lies in his writing. His writing provided him with a conducive contemplative refuge from the conflicts that beset him, but it became simultaneously the major means by which he concreted that persona by which he is remembered. In his writing, he found his niche, as it accommodated his intrinsic reflective nature, his ordered disposition, his growing social isolation and desire to avoid social conflict and his need for public influence.

At the end of his life in a letter to the “Trustees of the College of New Jersey,” Edwards revealed the benefits of his lifelong commitment to writing:

My method of study, from my first beginning the work of the ministry, has been very much by writing; applying myself in this way, to improve every important hint; pursuing the clue to my utmost, when anything in reading, meditation or conversation, has been suggested to my mind, that seemed to promise light in any weighty point. Thus penning what appeared to me my best thoughts, on innumerable subjects for my own benefit. The longer I prosecuted my studies in this method, the more habitual it became, and the more pleasant and profitable I found it.<sup>12</sup>

Right from the early stages of his career, it was obvious that literature was to be used strategically to fashion the public reception of the Edwards persona as a *litterateur*. Edwards

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<sup>11</sup> Richard L. Bushman, “Jonathan Edwards as a Great Man: Identity, Conversion, and Leadership in the Great Awakening,” in William J. Scheick, ed., *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards*, (Boston, Massachusetts: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980), 45.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Letter to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, Stockbridge, October 19, 1757,” in *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, 726-7.

set himself guidelines for writing in his “Cover-Leaf Memoranda,”<sup>13</sup> which embodied a carefully crafted set of compositional principles, aimed at achieving a deliberate impact on the readers. His strategy entailed shaping his writings around three key considerations: structure, tone and receptivity. He resolved to adopt a structure based on logic and rational exposition, aimed squarely at persuading his readership to accept and adopt his ideas. His writings should always start with a stark “unadorned proposition” supported by “clear definitions” and “axiomatic corollaries.” Such postulations should be used “at the beginning” of the whole work and at pivotal stages of the work, “such as chapters and sections.” The writing should then proceed by such rhetorical devices as “question and answer dialogue,” with everything delivered in a “clear orderly structure” that would be effectively incontrovertible. That his writing was meant primarily to lead readers to where he wanted them to be is evident from his great concern with tone (the attitude of the writer to his reader or, more importantly, how his attitude to his reader would be perceived) and his even greater concern with receptivity (the readers’ acceptance of him and his ideas). It was important to gain readers “not just to silence them.” At first he was very careful not to alienate his readers by potentially off-putting offensiveness or aloofness, which relied on a somewhat contrived “modesty in his composition.” However, as he became increasingly more self-assured, of both his doctrine and his authority, his literary tone became more overtly didactic, almost compelling rather than persuading readers to accept his thought.

Following the “Cover-Leaf Memoranda,” other works such as “Subjects of Enquiry” and “Sermon Notebook 45” contained more directions for Edwards himself to follow. Matters of style and literary technique appear with frequency. Publishing was always his goal. As a strategy, he would “publish small” at first before proceeding to greater experiments. That is, he would publish locally before in London and he would “write letters before major works” – all to ensure a gradually developed positive reception of his works and ideas. So it was that, right from the outset, Edwards strategically set out to shape his literary persona in a direction that, while starting with simple, direct personal writings, would culminate in his later, mature public treatises: the works that would demand acceptance.

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “*Natural Philosophy* Cover-Leaf Memoranda,” in Wallace E. Anderson, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 192-5.



(d) *Results: what sort of persona did Edwards ultimately fashion?*

In the attempt to discern just what sort of persona Edwards ultimately achieved, it is tempting to see a sort of dichotomy between the innate original character of the private man and the carefully manufactured image of the public figure. It is true that the innate Edwards was more comfortable when allowed to withdraw contemplatively into nature and to be in solitary meditation on the majesty of God. However, the very public life of Edwards demanded a more active role in ministry and controversy, which necessitated the genuine development of a public persona which, while not as naturally conducive, had to be none the less authentic if he was to carry out what he progressively saw as his duty before God. It remains now to judge whether that cultivated persona was a matter of some continuous inner contention or whether it was the result of a genuine growth that merged both the private and the public into an integrated unity in the final stages of his life. This final piece of analysis focuses therefore on the final picture that we have of the mature Edwards.

(i) *The Private Edwards*

In Edwards's final years of ministry, a character of indomitable fortitude yet calm resignation emerged. No longer seeking peer approbation, he adopted a position of distantiation from his people as a necessary mechanism for the exercise of his felt mandate. He remained, as he had started, in complete submission to his God. However, his self-understanding had grown to the point where he no longer viewed himself as a mere chronicler of events, a controversialist in debate or an apologist for a cause. Instead, he now saw himself as a genuine force for truth, a legitimate theological leader and ecclesial leader who merited a wider audience, a global audience. Thus he did not consider himself defeated by the incidents which led to his dismissal from Northampton and his quasi-exile at Stockbridge. Instead, he felt that he now had the freedom to transcend those former limitations of his influence. He saw a new-found opportunity for growth and satisfaction in a resumption of his studies. "My heart is so much in these studies," he said in considering the invitation to the presidency of Princeton, "that I cannot find it in my heart to be willing to put myself into an incapacity to pursue them any more, in the future part of my life, to such a degree as I must, if I undertake ... the office of a president." He now craved the possibility of devoting himself to a life of study with a view to broader publication. Stockbridge had provided the time and the place where he could capitalize on what was in essence his outstanding talent. His desire now was to express his grand understandings of God, the church and the world to his most wide-ranging audience. His pastoral and missions ministry was over; he now saw his future in his writing since, in his

own words, “So far as I myself am able to judge of what talents I have, for benefiting my fellow creatures by word, I think I can write better than I can speak.” Edwards had by now become firmly convinced that his talent was writing. He had now articulated for himself the potential for shaping his predominantly literary persona.

(ii) *The Public Edwards*

Now convinced that he could write better than he could speak, the public Edwards emerged more confidently as a self-assured authoritative theological and ecclesial leader. Forsaking the pulpit for the press, he now became an active and even aggressive leader and intentional shaper of religious thought. He had an almost indulgent self-confidence in his writing that was not deterred by any considerations of reader alienation. He wrote from a consciously lofty theological position with a prevailing tone of authorial superiority towards his readers. His prevailing message remained as it always had been: his concept of divine sovereignty and authority, crafted through formative experiences of engaging various alien forces, and now clearly defined and expressed. Now, however, there was that supreme self-confidence in his message and his right to proclaim it. The irrefutability of his views is a significant element of his developed public persona: the persona of the self-assured authoritative proclaimer of profound doctrine, designed to shape religious thought and practice both locally and beyond. As he grew in assurance and status, he changed from an observer and interpreter of events to an oracular shaper of belief and experiential practice.

(iii) *The Integrated Edwards*

As Edwards came to identify his personal strengths and desires and to define his more expansive public role, the private Edwards and the public Edwards at last had the opportunity to come together into a merged entity. His growing understanding of his public role now began to shape the very person that Edwards saw himself to be. In his later writings, there is ample evidence to suggest that he had now established clearly his own understanding of his persona and the literary means by which that persona would be exercised. The message of God’s sovereignty and excellency with its human counterpart of dependency and potential for divine re-creation had come to dominate the man and the man was convicted of his role as proclaimer of that message. The quasi-apostolic persona that he had previously tried to project had now become an authentic part of his essential make-up, but it was as a conjunct to his innate personal desire for holiness which had led him to seek God’s glory in a life of earnest meditation and the personal enjoyment of God’s sovereignty and beauty. It is a great

irony of Edwards's life and legacy that it was his loss of a long-held and cherished official pastoral position that liberated him to the point where he was able to shape definitively that persona that he had sought so long, but realized only in his final few years. This was manifest not in Edwards the preacher nor in Edwards the revivalist but in Edwards the writer, in which role he has exerted far more authoritative influence than he ever did as a public ministerial officer.

### **III CONCLUSION. JONATHAN EDWARDS: THE SELF-SHAPED MAN**

During his lifetime, Edwards undertook a journey that saw him work diligently to progress from a young minister to an elder statesman. At first, he was a local church pastor with a desire to be heard and he worked out various means of achieving that end, but essentially they all arose from his sense of the positional authority of a minister. Then, through a process of refinement necessitated by numerous conflicts, which undermined his confidence in ministerial authority, and facilitated by the enduring and progressively more confident sense of his own conversion experience and personal piety, he attained a public status of one who felt he had the right to be heard. Finally, in his post-Northampton days, relatively freed from the constraints of ecclesiastical politics and social distractions of office, he attained the self-assured quasi-apostolic status of one who believed not only that he had the right to be heard but indeed that he must be heard. Ultimately, the public face and the essential person became merged into one integrated whole. This is the development of that persona that he worked so consistently, so strategically and so successfully to fashion.

While Edwards attained widespread prominence in the final twenty years of his life, in a real sense his legacy is larger than his life. As a final word of evaluation, it can be seen that Edwards's literary output eclipsed his pastoral leadership. His standing as a champion of revival was based not on Edwards the revivalist practitioner (though that was creditable) but on Edwards the revivalist apologist and theologian. So too his status in missions was based not on what he did as a missionary (which was also creditable) but on his literary expertise in his edition of Brainerd's missions work which was to inspire so many. In summary, the Edwards persona was shaped definitively not by his praxis but by his writing. In some ways a somewhat pedestrian active practitioner, Edwards stamped himself as a superlative contemplative apologist and theorist of experiential spirituality. Now, more than 250 years and 4000 works of secondary scholarship later, it can rightly be said that his voice has been heard and that it continues to be heard, with a telling influence in guiding ongoing

scholarship and experiential piety. The persona of Edwards has been consolidated even more after his life than during it.

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## **APPENDIX: *Natural Philosophy* Cover-Leaf Memoranda**

Side i:

[Remember] to set down the order [in which] I would have the particulars stand, a mark here denoting the paragraphs.

Remember to set down this and the propositions following only as postulated, in short, without standing to prove them.

Place in the beginning definitions, as the definition of an atom or perfect solid, what I mean by touching by points, touching by lines, and by surfaces.

In the second place let there be postulate, which let be either axioms or principles exceedingly plainly deduced from them.

Let there not only be definitions and postulates at the beginning of the whole, but at the beginning of particular chapters and sections as there is occasion; which postulates and definitions may be referred to from other parts if it suits best. These may be put before even the sections in the midst of a chapter.

Side ii:

[1. Try] not only to silence but to gain readers.

[2. To give but] few prefatorial admonitions about the style and method. It doth an author much hurt to show his concerns for those things.

[3 What is] prefatorial, not to write in a distinct preface or introduction, but in the body of the treatise. Then I shall be sure to have it read by everyone.

[4. Let much] modesty be seen in the style.

[5.] Not to insert any disputable things, or that I will be likely to be disputed by learned men, for I may depend upon it they will receive nothing but what is undeniable from me, that is, in things exceedingly beside the ordinary way of thinking.

6. The world will expect more modesty because of my circumstances – in America, young, etc. Let there be a superabundance of modesty, and though perhaps 'twill otherwise be needless, it will wonderfully make way for its reception in the world. Mankind are by nature

proud and exceeding envious, and ever jealous of such upstarts; and it exceedingly irritates and affronts 'em to see 'em appear in print. Yet the modesty ought not to be affected and foolish, but decent and natural.

7. When I would prove anything, to take special care that the matter be so stated that it shall be seen most clearly and distinctly by everyone just how much I would prove; and to extricate all questions from the least confusion or ambiguity of words, so that ideas shall be left naked.

8. In the course of reasoning, not to pretend to be more certain than everyone will plainly see it is, by such expressions as "it's certain," "it's undeniable," etc.

9. To be very moderate in the use of terms of art. Let it not look as if I was much read, or conversant with books or the learned world.

10 In the method, in placing things first, respect is to be had to the easiness and intelligibility, the clearness and certainty, the generality, and according to the dependence of other things upon them.

[11.] Never to dispute for things after that I cannot handsomely retreat upon conviction of the contrary.

[12.] In writing, let there be much compliance with the reader's weakness, and according to the rules in *The Ladies' Library*, Vol.1, p.340 and seq.

In order to present the entirety of number 12, the full list of six rules is inserted here:

Rule I. Acquaint your selves thoroughly with the state of the Question; have a distinct Notion of your Object, whatever it be, and of the Terms you make use of, knowing precisely what it is you drive at.

Rule II. Cut off all needless Ideas, and whatever has not a necessary Connection to the Matter under Consideration; which serve only to fill up the Capacity of the mind, and to divide and distract the Attention. From the Neglect of this come those causless [sic] Digressions, tedious Parentheses, and impertinent Remarks, which we meet with in some Authors: For, as when our Sight is diffus'd and extended to many Objects at once, we see none of them distinctly; so when the Mind grasps at every Idea that presents it self, or rambles after such as related not

to its present Business, it loses its Hold, and retains a very feeble Apprehension of that which it should attend. Some have added another Rule, That we reason only on those things of which we have clear ideas. But that is a Consequence of the first; for we can by no means understand our Subject, or be well acquainted with the State of the Question, unless we have a clear Idea of all its Terms.

Rule III. Conduct your Thoughts by Order; beginning with the most simple and easy Objects, and ascending, as by Degrees, to the Knowledge of the more compos'd. Order makes every thing easy, strong, and beautiful. That Superstructure whose Foundation is not duly laid, is not like to last or please: Nor are they likely to solve the difficult, who have neglected, or slightly past over the easy Questions.

Rule IV. Leave no part of your Subject unexamin'd: It being as necessary to consider all that can let in Light, as to shut out all that is foreign to it. We may stop short of Truth, as well as overrun it; and tho' we look never so attentively on our proper Object, if we read but half of it, we may be as much mistaken, as if we extended our Sight beyond it. Some Objects agree very well when observ'd on one side, which upon turning the other shew a great Disparity. Thus the right Angle of a Triangle may be like to one part of a Square, but compare the whole, and you will find them very different Figures. A moral Action may in some Circumstances, be not only fit but necessary, which in others, where Time, Place, and the like, have made an Alteration, wou'd be most improper; and if we venture to act on the former Judgment, we may easily do amiss; if we wou'd act as we ought, we must view its new Face, and see what Aspect that looks on us.

To this Rule belongs that of dividing the Subject of our Meditations into as many parts as we can, and as shall be necessary to understand it perfectly. This indeed is most necessary in difficult Questions which will scarce be unravell'd, but in this manner by pieces: And let us take care to make exact Reviews, and to sum up our Evidence justly, before we pass Sentence and fix our Judgment.

Rule V. Always keep your Subject directly in your Eye, and closely pursue it thro' all your Progress; there being no better sign of a good Understanding, than thinking closely and pertinently, and reasoning dependently, so as to make the

former part of our Discourse support the latter; and this an Illustration of that, carrying Light and Evidence in every Step we take. The Neglect of this Rule, is the Cause why our Discoveries of Truth are seldom exact, that so much is often said to so little purpose, and many intelligent and industrious Readers, when they have read over a Book, are very little wiser than when they began it. That the two last Rules may be the better observ'd, 'twill be fit very often to look over our Process, so far as e have gone, that so, by rendring our Subject familiar, we may the sooner arrive to an exact Knowledge of it.

Rule VI. Judge no farther than you perceive, and take not any thing for Truth, which you do not evidently know to be so. Indeed in some Cases we are forc'd to content our selves with Probability, but 'twere well if we did so only, where 'tis plainly necessary; that is, when the Subject of our Meditation is such, as we cannot possibly have a certain Knowledge of it, because we are not furnish'd with Proofs, which have a constant and immutable Connexion with the Ideas we apply them to; or because we cannot perceive it, which is our Case in such Exigencies, as oblige us to act presently on a cursory View of the Arguments propos'd to us, where we want time to trace them to the bottom, and to make use of such means as wou'd discover truth.

To continue Edwards's own list of rules:

[13.] Let there always be laid down as many lemmata or preparatory propositions as are necessary to make the consequent propositions clear and perspicuous.

[14.] When the proposition allows it, let there be confirming corollaries, inferences for the confirmation of what had been before said and proved.

[15.] Oftentimes it suits the subject and reasoning best to explain by way of objection and answer, after the manner of dialogue, like the Earl of Shaftesbury.

16. Always, when I have occasion to make use of mathematical proof, to acknowledge my ignorance in mathematics, and only propose it to 'em that are skilled in that science whether or no that is not a mathematical proof.



17. Before I venture to publish in London, to make some experiment in my own country; to play at small games first, that I may gain some experience in writing. First to write letters to some in England, and to try my hand at lesser matters before I venture in great.

18. If I publish these propositions that are so metaphysical that 'tis probable will be very strange to many learned divines and philosophers, to propound 'em only by way of question, as modestly as possible, and the reasons for 'em; not as if I thought them anything well demonstrated, but only as worthy to bring the matter into consideration. Entirely submit 'em to the learned in nature ... and if it be possible, to conceal my determination.

19. Lest I may mention a great many things, and places of scripture, that the world will judge but frivolous reasons for the proof of what I drive at, not to mention such as I fear it of as what I depend on for proof, but to bring 'em in so that the force of the reasons will naturally and unavoidably be brought to the mind of the reader.

20. To bring in those things that are very much out of the way of the world's thinking as little as possible in the beginning of a treatise. It won't do, for mayhap it will give an ill prejudice and tincture to the readers' mind in reading the treatise. Let them be given a good opinion of the others first, and then they will more easily receive strange things from me. If I tell it at first, it will look something like affectation of telling something strange to the world. They must be pleased with seeing what they believed before cleared up before they will bear to see their opinions contradicted. Let the way be so paved that they may be unavoidably confirmed ... a belief.

[21.] Use as few terms of art as I can conveniently.

Two unnumbered entries found among the entries in the unnumbered series in "Natural Philosophy," both written in shorthand, are also concerned with the preparation of a treatise: [a.] Preface: Here are some things in this philosophy that have been published to the world before, perhaps, and I did not leave out because they were pertinent to the orderly continuity of the treatise. If I come to 'em, I will not stand to quote. Others, they that are acquainted with the learned world, will be able to distinguish. [b.] Order: Let there be axioms not only at the beginning of the treatise, but at the beginning of every part, to prepare the way for the easy reception of what follows. Let 'em be such as are very evident and plain, either in

themselves or from what men proved before. Let there also be corollaries at the end of every part that will make way for what is otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “*Natural Philosophy Cover-Leaf Memoranda*,” in Wallace E. Anderson, ed., *Jonathan Edwards Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 6 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1980), 192-195.